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Art and Social Dislocation

A Chinese Diasporic Condition

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Contents

Abstract

Chinese Diaspora is a phenomenon that historically reciprocates Orientalism, the twin frames of overseas Chinese identity. The effects of Orientalism mainly originated from the difference of cultures as well as the difference of human physical appearances. It is a perceptual force derived from the times of European colonial expansion. Power is a major factor in determining how a given subject has been orientalised. Its effects linger in contemporary times, when 'us and them' is often an unavoidable phrase for identifying others within a multicultural society.

Through the production of sculptural objects, this research investigates Orientalism in terms of self-insertion. Self-insertion is a means of orientalist practice that reconstructs 'others' in the form of self. When such practice is performed the original identity of the 'others' become less relevant to its western audience.

Nine pieces of sculptures were constructed as the result of this research. Each sculpture contained different connotations but within the same theoretical parameters. Cultural representation in the form of icons was used to signify different situations of Chinese Diaspora. Cultural icons such as the Greek temple façade connote a sense of power and a general western identity.
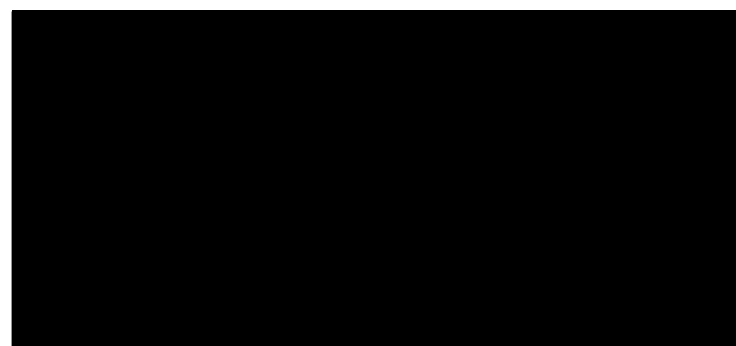
Chinese Diaspora concerns many areas of post-colonial studies but in the realm of art, it presents itself as a well documented visual history. Overseas Chinese have been visualized as friend and foe in western history. This visual intrigue has a profound value in the creative process of art.

This research concluded that Self-insertion operates in subtle ways and it is difficult to detect. As long as there is any trace of difference in human society, the politics of Orientalism will strive and so as its art and counter art will be produced. Self-insertion can be seen as an art form in its own right.

Statement

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other institution and, to the best of my knowledge, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the documentation.

Albert Yi Fu Chen

Acknowledgements

Introduction

In submitting the new body of visual research entitled *Art and Social Dislocation*, I am proposing some sculptural expressions of attitudes, social pressures, historical analyses and personal feelings in the area of the Chinese Diaspora. This documentation explores some aspects of the context and touches on the content of the three-dimensional works, with a view to making their intentions and possible meaning more available to scrutiny.

Being a Chinese and living outside my original cultural location arouses discourses of many 'encounters'. That is not to say all these encounters are negative; nor will it paint a graceful and flattering picture of 'cultural exchange'. In fact, it is a situation that cannot be described with one frame of mind but with a mix of feelings. Hence, as an artist, how would one visualize such a situation and express it artistically? It would be easy to locate an artistic inquiry within narrow epistemological parameters. 'As visual inquiry, art is simply a way of knowing, understanding, integrating and synthesizing experience.'[1] I feel that artistic expression may be more than simply a way of knowing or understanding but stages certain paradoxes, perhaps essentially irresolvable, which do not quite meet the criterion of 'integrating and synthesizing experience'. In my case, Diaspora is experienced keenly and relates to cultural identifications that in some sense may be 'understood'; but Chinese identity in this context is more than a question whose answer is implicitly understood. Rather, it presents contradictions, contrasts of an alien history and

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[1] Wenger, R. *Visual Art, Archaeology and Gestalt*, Leonardo, 1997, Vol. 30 Issue 1, p 35, 12 p.

geographical location on many frontiers within culture and within the person that strive for a poetic recognition.

The question of non-European identity was either suppressed or exaggerated during the time of European colonisation because assimilation or exclusion were the goals of colonial conquest. This attitude carried on even to the mid twentieth century. It was not until the colonised had recovered from the process of de-colonisation, that the quest for cultural identity started to emerge. Art and social dislocation are necessarily part of the study of postcolonial phenomena. It belongs to a grand tacit debate between the West and rest of the world. There are two major attitudes in the Western Diaspora on which postcolonial theory is based. One is the apologetic attitude towards those cultures and nations that were colonised and suffered the effects of Western colonisation. Another is the defensive attitude in the belief that Western colonisation is merely a part of human evolution. Similarly, the rhetoric by the people of the colonised world has two distinctive perspectives. Resentment is the one shared by most of the non-Western world. The other view exists in a state of confusion, because Western colonisation has destroyed many indigenous cultures and transformed many 'old' nations, which have since become modernized. Many believe modernization has provided a way out of their 'backward' and 'decaying' kingdoms. There are many paradoxes that complicate the issues of feeling and debate from a non-Western point of view.

The artistic approach towards issues of social dislocation has to be that of visual presentation. In terms of Chinese Diaspora, the inspiration is in part, from historical visual bigotry, which has appeared in the mass media (see page 3). This representation
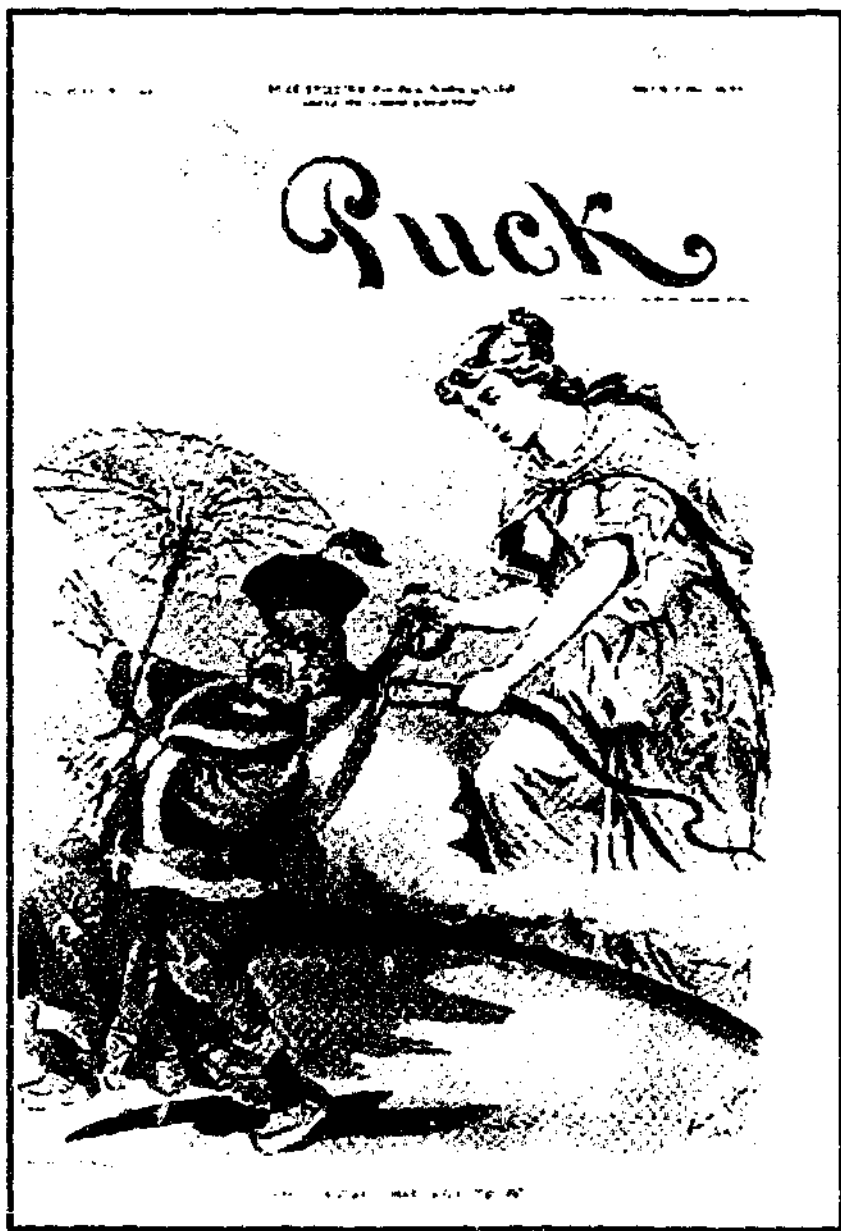
1.
'The Pigtail Has Got to Go'
Puck Vol. 44 1898,
Cover.
From: The Asia Society Galleries (ed.)
Asia/America The News Press, New York,
1994, p 19.

2.
Joseph Hull
'Ah Sin'
1870
From: The Asia Society Galleries (ed.)
Asia/America The News Press, New
York, 1994, p 17.

3.
'The Yellow Gulf Stream'
Melbourne Punch, 29 March 1888.
From: Eric Rolls *Sojourners* University of
Queensland Press, Queensland, 1992, p 472.

4.
'The Only Way' Federation as White
Australia, Melbourne Punch, 10 May 1888.
From: Eric Rolls *Sojourners* University of
Queensland Press, Queensland, 1992, p
463.

documents a development of how the Chinese were portrayed and this may also be compared to the contemporary thinly veiled bigotry of the Chinese and Asian people such as that of Pauline Hanson's maiden parliamentary speech : *Australia will be swarmed by Asians.*[2]

The Chinese Diaspora as a social cultural discourse has many sub-dimensions, and these are in a state of entanglement. One major discourse is the difference between human conventions. Through history, human society has been plagued by the fear of difference or fear of the unknown. While this negative impulse can be destructive, it can also become artistically imaginative. When dealing with the unfamiliar, people rely on an imagination based on their own knowledge, that creates myths without real primary observation. These 'constructs' based on imagination were created by many alternating realities. 'Otherness', is such a discourse within Chinese Diaspora. It has a slight theoretical variation compared to anyone's individual difference in a given society. Collective differences in the form of culture or genetical makeup draw a distinction between 'them and us' that has again contributed to the fear of the unknown. There are other theoretical investigations such as orientalism and civilisational conflict that are related to postcolonial theory, migration and the de-colonisation process. All these investigations are related in such way that one could not mention one without the other. The rhetoric of difference has also a political dimension because it separates us and them. As Barbara Maria Stafford suggested that:

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[2] Stratton, J. *Race Daze* Pluto Press, NSW, 1998, p 56.

Both the intellectual and the practical emphasis on extreme otherness, added to a flat and homogeneous view of similarity as stale iteration, have resulted in an aesthetic, philosophical, ethical and social calamity. We seem to be obsessed with identity, not recognition.[3]

In this cause migration is a phenomenon that brings different human conventions together in a 'point blank range' and sets up a confrontational stage with a cultural construct of the past and present. Thus, the condition of Chinese Diaspora (or Diaspora in general) presents not just entanglements of social theories but also an entanglement of the past and present. In terms of art the association with graphical expression and the Diasporic condition (or experiences) are ambiguous and unparalleled to their counterparts in the literary disciplines. Diaspora is usually presented in text as a narrative of an individual or a collective experience. Story-telling presents an effective way to portray such an experience and with a personal touch. Art objects are handicapped in presenting such a story. Therefore, within the frame of this visual investigation, the aim is to capture the essence of Diasporic condition rather than presenting a narrative.

China in the West

The history of the Chinese perceived by the West has a long history. One is the romantic trade on the silk route of the Tang dynasty, whilst a more solid record could be the negative impression of the Mongolian expansion. During that time people of the East (not necessary the Chinese) were perceived as monstrous creatures (see page 6). This

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[3] Stafford, B. M. *Visual Analogy* The MIT Press, Cambridge, 1999, p 180.

五耳國在無腹國東其人虎文耳長過膝

捧耳而行

5.

6.

奇肱神圖

7.

8.

Ancient and medieval times: Europeans perceived people from the East with ears as large as winnowing fans (figure 6) and men whose heads grow beneath their shoulders(figure 8).

See the Chinese parallel that appeared in a book called *Shan-Hai Ching* (Classic of Mountains and Seas). Long eared gentleman (figure 5) and Headless immortal (figure 7).

perception has changed form era to era. Until trade had physically reached China from Europe (both by land or sea and without a middle agent), the Western perception of the Chinese had a better grounding.

During the early seventeenth century, Chinese were perceived as noble, wise and spiritual people. After Marco Polo's journey to the East, a thirst for acquiring the knowledge of this wealthy and yet mysterious Empire arose. This positive perception all became soured when the Europeans met the decline of the Chinese Empire during the eighteenth century. The Chinese thus became backward and inferior sub humans. This perception was due to the demise of China in the nineteenth century and the Chinese manual workers in the West. 'Chinese immigrants were 'negroised' or treated as 'near black' in racially polarized California'[4] Unfortunately, some aspects of this historical impression of the Chinese people has extended to the present day.

The Chinese in Australia present a common set of human behavioral patterns regarding acceptance and rejection when encountering an alien race. The Chinese migrated to America and Australia for the prize of gold. Due to the distinctive difference between The Chinese and the Anglo-Celtic in appearance, language, customs and most importantly the willingness to communicate with other nationalities had resulted in many misunderstanding and bloodshed. Fortunately, those days of apparent conflict are gone. It is however, replaced by mostly a very subtle gesture of intolerance and occasionally political outburst of discrimination. As a Chinese person plunged into history-

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[4] Kim, C. J. 'The Racial Triangulation of Asian Americans', *Politics & Society*, Mar 99, Vol. 27 Issue 1, p 105, 34 p.

experiencing many encounters of unpleasant insults in contemporary Australian society-I find that 'retribution' of any kind is surely a tempting option for reclaiming my personal ego and integrity. But cultural revenge or retribution in this manner can degrade the artistic intent of this visualisation of Chinese Diaspora. I would rather let it be a propellant but not a cause.

Through all the various contexts in which the artwork is produced in this visual research, there is an extensive use of cultural icons. These icons are to be described as objects and their connotation may be 'culturally-bound'.[5] When it comes to interpretations these objects need to relate to both the social experience of individual viewers and the forms in which they are located in a historical and cultural context within the larger universe of visual expression.[6]

The debate of Orientalism is in the second of introductory chapters. It also defines Orientalism and its extensions. The second chapter is devoted to the sculptural tradition and justifying the use of material according to artistic intention. Part one opens up an argument of Chinese cultural position in a Western society. Part two is devoted to the investigation of the most widely used cultural icon – the ancient Greek temple as a representation of Western governmental institutions because 'in orientalism, the West is the recipient of Greek virtues (philosophy, democracy and individualism)'.[7] This

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[5] Seifert, L. S. *Picture as a Means of Conveying Information*, Journal of General Psychology, Jul92, Vol. 119 Issue 3, p 279, 9p.
[6] Miller, A. *Breaking Down the Preserves of Visual Production*, American Art, Summer 97, Vol. 11 Issue 2, p 11, 3 p.
[7] Turner, B. *Marx and the End of Orientalism*, George Allen & Unwin, Boston, p 8.

implication opens several visual intrigues by its application in a variety of situations in the landscape. It is a Diasporic visualisation of Chinese identity in a postcolonial Western society. The sense of Chineseness in Diaspora is the theme of part three.

The premise of this research is not the first in this line of inquiry and not entirely unique. There are overseas Chinese artists and writers who are already producing artworks and writings in the situation of Diaspora. The discourse; either as forms of art or Diasporic text; seem to attract incomprehension, suspicion and resentment from the 'hosting' group. If artists have firmly expressed a Diasporic resentment towards the hosting country rather than veiling their feeling as an 'irony' or as a 'self critique'-their work will most likely be labeled as literalist propaganda or as a sign of ingratitude. One of the prime examples was the *Asian/American*[8] exhibition in the USA where a group of Asian American artists put together an exhibition addressing the issue of migration and Diaspora. Alice Yang in her book *Why Asia* observed and quoted Kay Larson who had written a response to this exhibition in the *New York* magazine. She said 'the migrants tell of loneliness, sleeping on floors, working at dull jobs, learning that nobody cares. Sounds familiar, doesn't it? I could sympathize, and I do, but what did they expect?'[9] As Yang replied in her book, I have my reservations about the exhibition, but there is a sense of latent hostility in Larson's review.

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[8] Machida, M. (Curator) *Asia/America, Identities in Contemporary Asian American Art*, The Asia Society Galleries, The New Press, New York, 1996, p 6.
[9] Larson, K. *"Asian Minor"* New York 27, No. 10 March 7, 1994, p 80.

The content does not quite amount to a declaration like: "Go home if you don't like this country," even though some would see this as implicit.[10] Larson did not go so far; but her language and the predicament it describes are part of an unproductive cycle of reproach and defense that I would like to avoid. Larson asks rhetorically "what did they expect?" On the face of it, the question is fair. If a penniless Russian, speaking only Slavic languages, travels to Singapore, he or she can expect nothing but hardship, for the State is unlikely to support a migrant help program. So in one sense Larson is right. The loneliness and grit experienced by migrants is a world reality, unless, of course, a person as a professional is lucky enough to travel in solicited circumstances. The slightly unpleasant force of Larson's critique however, is not that it alleges an inevitability of migrant suffering (which may or may not be fair) but that it implies artistic mediocrity in the expression. The artwork which champions this idea is obvious. It is built around a truism. That is no point in the artistic conception because its single issue is a platitude. As a result, the artistic outcome is discredited as art, let alone social critique. Who would will this impotence upon himself or herself?

Consequently, I believe that it is unproductive for an artwork to be seen to haggle over the justice of social claims, such as those at issue above. As a migrant one may or may not be denied the right to criticise the host (Western) culture. Further, the incidence cited may really spark anger and a feeling of powerless that reminds migrants that they must accept a hostile and sly rhetoric against them. But this anger cannot directly be expressed in the form of art, lest one attract pedantic adversaries and cultural critiques.

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[10] Yang, A. *Why Asia?* New York University Press, New York, 1998, p 105.

Therefore, art centered around Diaspora is not without problems. As Young further points out, Asians in the West try to articulate their own position within the residing society; they run the risk or reducing it into a formulaic set of generalities. When trying to run a critical discussion within a Diasporic community, they run the risk of isolation and segregation, not to mention artistic literalness, content that can be dismissed as obvious or even carping and boring. But if they do not even try, they are also running the risk of losing the possibility of articulating the distinctiveness of their experience and culture; their work will not be visualised and comprehended. 'Whatever they do, their position in relation to the mainstream remains highly ambivalent.'[11] Of course, this predicament can be compared to that of any other marginal opposite group, such as Australian Aborigines, especially urban Aborigines.

To visualise Chinese Diaspora and to create artworks that proceed honestly from experience and consciousness as a Diasporic citizen is not a simple task of representation. One may feel the need to deal with a Western historical framework and abide by the system of cultural perceptions. Ethno-racial minorities do not really have control over systems for producing images and discourse for themselves, nor in one sense may they even want to dictate the terms of artistic engagement, for this would logically defeat the goal of egalitarian understanding of difference. The system that exists is tacitly constructed around the mainstream for the purpose of promoting, supporting and affirming forms of exclusion. One might add to this that cultural production is inherently embedded with conflicting meanings.[12] Even Chineseness in Diaspora is a nebulous

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[11] Yang, A. *Why Asia?* New York University Press, New York, 1998 p 105.
[12] Tator, C. *Challenging Racism in the Arts*, University of Toronto Press, Toronto, 1998, p 8.

entity that cannot be easily identified; and massive risks are invited if the one wishes to defy conventional knowledge of such constructs.

In the eyes of the non-Chinese, the definition is simple. It can be identified by locating 'differences'. Indeed, an apparent example such as the Diasporic phenomenon of Chinatown presents a primary symbol and a cultural perimeter of a localised Chineseness. Within it, one can find an abundance of visual objects artificially representing Chinese culture. The ownership of these objects does not at first sight signify an Orientalist practice over a culture. On the contrary, it is understood as altogether benign, a symbol of cultural inclusiveness. In this sense, it can be perceived as an emblem of a person's cultural intrigue and belongings regardless of one's own genetical make up. A person with no connection to China beyond the relish in Chinese cuisine, may enjoy the colour of identifying with Chinese culture. But in this marvelous sense of inclusiveness, one may detect that there are also claims of cultural authority that can no longer be measured by one's 'own' history, cultural inheritance and birthright but which surreptitiously grant the cultural visitor rights of access and ownership. Within the delights of multiculturalism, there is even a shadow of the imperial. This complicated quest for Chineseness needs to be pieced together in the situation of Diaspora, taking account of the conditions of what is out there, and synthesizing the consciousness in artistically sensitive metaphors.

Visualizing Orientalism/Occidentalism and their extensions

Primitivism has two faces, and its romantic face is by far the prettier. This is the one that gave the world a whole collection of colorful and eccentric Englishmen who liked to dress up as Arabs, jump onto camels and ride about over the sands of the Middle East, what the camels made of it is anyone's guess - but it was harmless stuff on the whole, and Lawrence of Arabia was only the most famous of his countrymen to enjoy the Masquerade.[1]

Roger Sandall

Orientalist practice is the effect of the cultural construct by a dominant economic, militarist and political hegemony. For me, visualizing Orientalism has been a search of the condition of Chinese Diaspora. The implication of Orientalist or Occidentalist practice has a wide scope and cannot necessarily be confined to the camps of East and West. It is generally about the methods and politics of interpretations of Otherness. European colonisation has been the event that endorsed the practice of Orientalism over Western others. Hence, its historical relevance of the present cannot be ignored. The Orientalism debate is incomplete if without its isomorphic twin – Occidentalism. As opposed to Orientalism, Occidentalism is a reversed culturalist practice that it exploits to romanticize Occidental culture. They are both the products of cultural interaction and a

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[1] Sandall, R. *The Culture Cult, Designer Tribalism and Other Essays*, Westview Press, Colorado, 2001, p vii.

duet of parallel cultural practices. In addition, the question over the effects of European

colonisation cannot be limited to the sense of physical conquests. Rather, one needs to

consider it as 'shock waves' that transmitted from the colonies to un-colonized 'Oriental

geography' as well as including unwitting cultural transformation.

The phenomenon of the Chinese diaspora is closely associated with Orientalism due to

the nature of social dislocation and the method of human perception of Otherness.

Therefore, the problem of Orientalism lies in its intention of cultural interpretation.

Intention in this sense, is an ongoing process with its own evolution and transformation.

An 'historical pilgrimage'[2] for the matter of culturalist practice is thus warranted.

The problem of Orientalism lies in its cultural interpretation. Studies conducted during

the Euro-colonial expansion in the eighteenth century over the Orient were not without

unavoidable prejudices. The European scholar's visions and judgments were diluted by

the military and technical superiority that their nation possessed. Thus, Orientals

including culture and people became third world objects. Today, the inheritances of this

colonial vision towards others still exists. The most apparent physical evidence of this

part of human history is the collection of many third world artifacts in eurocentric

museums. No one would criticise the acquisition of objec from other cultures; indeed,

curatorial policy can be seen as chauvinistic if it excludes them and damned on that basis.

To some extent, however, this inclusiveness can be related to colonialism, whence the

artifacts within the august collections are the symbolic trophies of Euro-imperial

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[2] The notion of historical pilgrimage was inspired by a book entitled *Pilgrims to the Past* by Blusse, L. (ed.) published by Research School CNWS 1996.

expansion. By what criterion does one judge the intention? The *bona fides*, in some sense, rests with the Oriental scholarship that accompanies the object, and deflects any sense of prejudice or arrogance that might be associated with cultural plunder. Many Western scholars envy and respect Oriental culture as well as its creators. The artifacts in western museums by no means always carry the negative connotation of imperialism; indeed, often the artifacts have been preserved from the cause of imperialism and its aftermath. A visualisation of this analogy is clearly stated by historian Deborah Root when she states:

> The West sought to affirm colonial domination over territory. the world increasingly came to be imagined as a vast warehouse of images: other cultures became signs and fragments of a world destroyed in advance and of a difference and authenticity that could be aestheticized and consumed in the west.[3]

In various guises, and despite the luster of scholarship, Oriental culture in its oldness and backwardness becomes a selling point even in the time from postmodernism to the new millennium. But in the rightness or otherwise of Orientalism, there is a prior issue.

In speaking of Orientalism one must define the meaning of Orient. The term Orient involves such a vast space-time continuum that it is difficult to come up with a precise definition. 'Orient as a geographical term means different places to different European (imperial powers)'[4]. The meaning of the 'West' also differs from culture to culture and

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[3] Root, D. *Cannibal Culture,* Westview Press, Colorado, 1996, pp x-xi.
[4] Said, E. *Orientalism,* Penguin Books, London, 1995, p 1.

nation to nation in the eyes of Asians. Today use of the term 'Orient' is generally confined to the era of Euro-colonial expansion. Because Orientalism objectifies Eastern culture, it generally characterises people and geography that were subject to colonization. Orientals (like the vulgar adjectival form 'Aboriginals') is a term that Asian scholars resent in the post-modern era. Asia and the Middle East are the accepted terms for describing the 'new Orient' so that they are no longer generalized as part of a vast geography which included large number of different cultures whose only common quality was non-Europeanness. Within this research, the concern is the interaction between East/Western cultures (preferably from eighteenth century onwards). The European colonial expansion is the essential issue and the major concern of the Orientalist interpretation of Oriental culture (or Otherness in general). The perception of Otherness is part of human learning as literary critic Antony Tatlow suggests:

> Infants only see the unfamiliar and are fascinated by it. The new must be continually habituated, and then it no longer interests. The psychology of perception describes this as "habituation". We lose this psycho-physiological impulse as we reach an acceptable functional level. Then the unfamiliar becomes more problematic. It challenges our categories. We assimilate it or alter them.[5]

We view others and identify them in most cases without a true understanding of the subject. Even when it comes to the study of foreign cultures within the setting of academic discipline, cultural bias is inevitable. 'Cultural discourse and exchange within

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[5] Tatlow, A. from Gerstle, A. & Milner, *Recovering the Orient*, Harwood Academic London, 1994, p 83.

a culture...is not a truth but a representation'.[6] An Orientalist idea of the Orient was an attitude with strong prejudice in mind. It presupposes a superior Western stance looking down on the East. While colonial domination over the Orient is no longer obvious, this attitude still exists today in certain vestigial attitudes.

Any discussion of Orientalism needs to address Edward Said - a literary scholar whose book *Orientalism* of 1978 - has had a major impact on the studies of 'Otherness' and the politics of cultural perception ever since. Said's *Orientalism* has become a paradigm in its own right since its first release. His thesis is based on the notion of the Oriental identity being constructed by Europeans for the control of their Oriental colonies. Cultural perception in his terms has contributed to power, military, political, and economic. Whoever holds such power has the 'authority' to construct the identity of Otherness by means of self-assertion. That is to construct western others by inserting the intention and the imagination of the west. However, Said's *Orientalism* is not concerned with how the Orient was represented and whether or not it was faithful to its original content. As Arif Dirlik has stated,

> Orientalism is not the correctness or erroneousness of Orientalist representation, but the metonymic reductionism that led to the portrayal of these societies in terms of some cultural trait or other, that homogenized differences within individual societies, and froze them in history.[7]

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[6] Said, E. *Orientalism*, Penguin Books, London, 1995 p 21.
[7] Dirlik, A. *Chinese History and the Question of Orientalism*, History & Theory, 1996, Vol. 35 Issue 4, p 96, 23 p.

Metonymic is a keynote in this discussion. Orientalism concerns the systematically schematized representation of culture and the construction of history of far-reaching geography and people in oblique and enigmatic ways.

As the world moves beyond the threshold of the new millennium, 'neo-Orientalism'[8] is working at a global level, where the practice exists in our everyday life due to the phenomena of Westernisation, migration and multiculturalism. The effects of migration have intensified the process of Orientalist practice, because both the formerly remote colonial object and people of Third World appearance are now within arm's reach. This has triggered two diametrically opposite reactions in the hosting post-colonial nations such as America, Australia and Canada towards the 'Oriental' migrants. One is the benign enthusiasm for multicultural colour mentioned in the previous chapter; the other is hostility. The very first Chinese immigration to a predominately European nation agitated the 'white' population. During the early phase of national development of present-day Australia, the Chinese were used as scapegoat for the unification of colonial states. This unpleasant perception of the Chinese nowadays might be over but some historical inscriptions in appearances or genetic differences may linger and discrimination are perhaps likely to stay.

Western knowledge is now the international standard for measuring most human intellectual excellence. The international strength of this standard is reinforced by its

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[8] Bartholomeusz, T. *'Spiritual Wealth and Neo-Orientalism'* Journal of Ecumenical Studies, Winter 98, Vol. 35 Issue 1, p 19, 14 p.

apparent universality in most prestigious Japanese, Chinese, Indian and Korean academies. Western knowledge, as well as common greed, contributed to the European colonization of the world. Non-westerners who have resided in or studied in the west or who have studied in their home country but in western paradigms will find a specifically Eastern form of knowledge hard to locate. This is a paradox rather than a conflict that resulted from the colonial occupation and the translation of the indigenous knowledge and its western generalization in the name of rationality and science.

Orientalist cultural studies have been broken down into many sub-categories such as South Eastern Asia studies, Studies of Japan, Sinology and so forth. Although these disciplines try to distance themselves from their colonial predecessors, they still inherit a residue of the imperial attitude. In short, it all comes down to the establishment of cultural authority and academic domination. The debate of cultural authority can be drawn towards the setting of the Euro-centric Museum. It represents the authority of cultural scholarship over the 'Orient' by means of 'acquisition' of artifacts from their colonial conquest. Tim Barringer suggested that 'When such objects are removed from their original contexts, and are subjected to appropriation and exhibition, their meaning undergoes radical changes.'[9] This process has converted and removed aspects of non-European cultures into objects of ornamentation without their original context intact. This phenomenon of objectification of cultural material is abstracted in the catalogue: 'the

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[9] Barringer, T. *Colonialism and the Object,* Flynn, T. Routledge, London, 1998, p 2.

wonder House of the Present is the catalogue, where fragments of the East are commodities of the West.'[10] However, it does not solely apply to the West, because the consumption of culture is no longer based on the old colonial order but has been replaced by the power of the economy and the consumer's financial ability (see page21). Asian collections are equally predatory and abstract meaning from various traditions in a somewhat uprooting spirit. Metropolitan areas are perhaps the new centers for cultural consummation. Cultural goods have been self - Orientalised or Occidentalised for the purpose of sales. Hence, I conclude that the objectification of cultural artifacts is closely related to the global economy and consumerism.

Recent Orientalist practice such as recent animation film *Mu Lan* from Hollywood, carries the legacy of an imperial attitude. On the other hand, the Occidentalist practice also bears the scars of a shattered cultural confidence since the Asian rivaling of European technical superiority. I will examine Occidentalism in regard to China and Japan, because they represent two distinct attitudes towards the perception of the West. Chinese Occidentalism, before the effects of European colonialism, was equal to its counterpart in Europe in general. It was before the mid Ching dynasty (1644-1912), where the Chinese thought they were the center of the universe. Worlds outside of China were merely uncivilized and in inhabited by fearsome barbarian tribes. They demonized as well as romanticised their Chinese others. After the Chinese were dismasted by the superiority of Western technology, the ruin of the Japanese invasion and the communist

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[10] Bartholomeusz, T. *'Spiritual Wealth and Neo-Orientalism'* Journal of Ecumenical Studies, Winter 98, Vol. 35 Issue 1, p 19, 14 p.

あなたの心豊かな生活空間づくりに彫像レプリカをお届けいたします。

9.
Moulages du Musee du Louvre
A catalogue of reproduction from Louvre museum as sold in Yokohama Art Museum.
BSS Art Publication Centre Japan, 1993.

revolution, China had developed a different view towards the West. Xiao-mei Chen wrote that

> the Chinese government used the essentialisation of the West as a means for supporting a nationalism that affected the internal suppression of its own people. In this process, the Western other is construed by a Chinese imagination, not for the purpose of dominating the West but in order to discipline, and ultimately to dominate, the Chinese self at home.[11]

The portrayal of the West in China especially during the Mao era, was for the purpose of internal control. There were many temptations of capitalist philosophy in the eyes of the communist rulers. The Western notion of individualism and democracy was a potential threat to weaken and corrupt the strong hold of a centralized political system as well as a confused style of social integrity. The West was demonized to some extent to discourage the communist Chinese not to seek the capitalist dream.

Japan, in terms of Occidentalism, has a very different attitude compared to its Asian others - due to the fact that Japan does not carry the same cultural baggage as Chinese does. Throughout history, the Japanese have been the appropriator of culture. First, it was the adaptation of Chinese and Korean cultures; later it was the appropriation of Western philosophy and technology. Conversely, due to the failure of the Opium war the Chinese imperial government had come to a realisation of an urgency to be Westernised. However,

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[11] Chen, X. *Occidentalism*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1995, p 5.

22

it failed because the majority of the Chinese population still clung on to a China-centric attitude.

It is commonly felt that whenever there is a culture that the Japanese consider superior, they will learn from it and assimilate it without hesitation. Before the Meiji Westernisation during the mid eighteenth century, Japan was virtually an imprint of a Confucian nation. It was the demonstration of Western technology on the Bay of Kyoto that converted Japan to become a westernized nation in which they later practiced their own version of imperialism and colonisation.

Japan may be seen as a mirror image of Britain. It absorbed the spirit of Western civilization and became a master of it. In many ways it has beaten the 'West' in industrialisation, especially manufacturing. With the success of Japan's economy and technology - they have the will and the resources to consume other cultures in a way that equates with Orientalism.

The catalogue of reproduction of European artifacts in Japanese museums is an ironic evidence of Japanese Occidentalism. They have the ability to purchase re-productions of European artifacts as their commodity. This reflects the power of the economy: rich countries such as Japan and some other Asian regions enjoy the luxury of the 'procession' of culture. If this notion of commodifying a culture is interpreted in another way, it might mean the spread of European influence and the pervasive presence of European values

and culture in the homes of the Orient. M. R. Creighton has examined Japanese Occidentalism through their portrayal of *gaijin*[12] in advertising campaigns. He stated that

> Japanese renderings of gaijin are occidentalisms that stand opposed to Japanese Orientalism about themselves. Representations of the *gaijin* other create and highlight contrasting statements about the specialness of being Japanese. Among the essentialized self-Orientalisms created are Japanese assertions of uniqueness and cultural homogeneity.[13]

After examining the practice of cultural interpretation from both the Occident and the Orient, I have reached a conclusion that they are equally unjustified on account of cultural representation. The truth of the Otherness has not been the real concern. Rather, it is more about the art of alteration and misinterpretation of Otherness for the serving of political purposes externally and internally alike. Thus, 'the relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of Power, of domination of varying degrees of a complex hegemony'[14]. The dilemma of Occidentalism and Orientalism lies in positioning cultural ownership and genetic differences. An Asian can ridicule their own image in a way that a Westerner cannot, or he/she will face criticism of racism and cultural appropriation. Cultural truth has perhaps never been the intent for the study of Otherness, but to discover what can be utilized for alteration and appropriation for the purpose of control.

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[12] Gaijin literally mean 'outsider' or 'foreigner' in Japanese.
[13] Creighton, M. R. *'Imaging the Other in Japanese Advertising Campaigns'* In Carrier, J. (ed.) *Occidentalism* Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995.

Self-Orientalization and Diaspora

Diaspora is the main concern of this research. The whole notion of Orientalism has been triggered by the effect of Diaspora that resulted in the muticulturalness of our society. However, various writers suggest that to be able to distinguish oneself from the 'new' environment during the course of Diaspora - one needs to draw strength from the culture he/she came from. Antony Tatlow vividly described this notion with the example of Chinese Diaspora, he states:

> Western and Eastern perceptual conventions can be a breed of their own reductive moments through such confrontations. China is reminded of its own dialectical past which should help ease the constrictions of an imposed positivism, whilst Western thought is reminded of the perpetual motion of the socio-ecological cybernetic which Chinese art suggested on the perceptual level congruent with the dynamic of that culture. In both cases, an encounter with the alien also offers an opportunity for an acculturation or transformation of one's own neglected past.[15]

Therefore, self-Orientalization is an act of re-interpreting one's culture in the situation of Diaspora that 'identity is not 'discovered' but established by acts of self-representation that are always essentially political.'[16]

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[14] Said, E. *Orientalism*, Penguin Books, London, 1995, p 5.
[15] Tatlow, A. form Gerstle, A. & Milner, *Recovering the Orient*, Harwood Academic London, 1994, p 83.
[16] Ashcroft, B. Edward Said: *The Paradox of Identity* Ahluwalia, P. Routledge, New York, 1999, p 13.

There are many artists who fit into this category; artists such as She Ze Way, an overseas Chinese painter in the west-who has prevailed in the domain of western art market. A contributing factor behind his success is the subject matter that he has chosen. He uses western oil painting techniques to portray Chinese historical figures and classical themes with a realism of the romantic style. The technique itself does not warrant his success but rather, the combination of his painting technique and the subjects depicted-makes his painting stand out against those of his western contemporaries. If he was merely a non-objective painter or a perceptual impressionist painter, his existence would be comparable to a droplet in the sea of Western art and no art dealer or critic would especially notice him.

Orientalism in art

Orientalism in western art during the nineteenth century has illustrated and portrayed people and objects of the near East parallel to their colonial practice. Artists have depicted the picturesque backwardness of a decaying Oriental society; and this justified the act of European colonial expansion. That is, to Westernise (modernize civilize) the world and bring the rest of the world to catch up with the industrialization of the West. As John Mackenzie states:

> Visions of the Orient were highly selective, creating Oriental archetypes through which the 'Otherness of eastern peoples could be readily identified. Tyranny, cruelty, laziness, lust, technical backwardness languid fatalism and cultural

10.
Two 'dwarfed' Chinese tomb warriors in
Melbourne Garden Show
2001
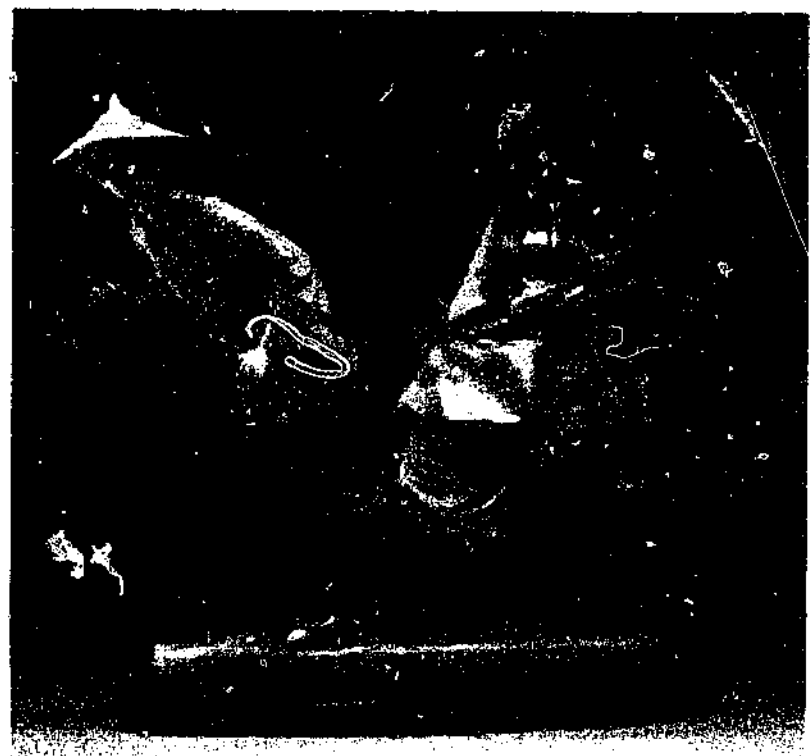
11.
Orientalist figurines as displayed in
apartment stores
2001

She Ze Way
Title: untranslatable
Oil on canvas
175x279cm

decadence generally, offered a justification for imperial rule and a program for its reforming zeal.[17]

I have mentioned that when the unfamiliar is remote then it is easier to romanticize a distant culture and people. It has been practiced on account of not knowing them very well but being eager to fathom exotic aspects of their identity. This understanding is based on the colonial occupation of the Orient. Nevertheless, this has given the West a sense of false authority over the Oriental culture.

This colonial dialogue between the West and the Orient has also provided artists with a new dictionary of images. Western art evolved in the late nineteenth century and reached a threshold in terms of Mannerism. Artists were eager to have objects of novelty in their art works. John Mackenzie has a converse view,

> European artists projected on to the East not only the fantasies and the fear of the West, but also aspirations renewed values and wished-for freedoms. Paradoxically, they often sought to portray not the strikingly different, but the oddly familiar.[18]

Thus, the Orientalist artist could be described as a Mannerist going the wrong way, because despite the physical difference we are all human and share similar desires. The novelty they aspired to was nothing more than the representation of objects without

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[17] Mackenzie, J. M. *Orientalism: History, Theory and the Arts*, Manchester University Press, New York, 1995, p 46.
[18] Ibid, p 55.

substance. The Romantic aspect of the practice is carried on to the present day. There are operas such as *Miss Saigon* and *Madam Butterfly*. If the female character were replaced by a Western woman instead of an Asian, the show would not be a hit but a shock. There are also Disney's recent cartoon movies like *Pocahontas* and as mentioned *Mu Lan*. This remaking of the history of American Indian and Chinese is what I refer to as cultural imperialism.

These movies are targeting new generations of world children to accept a history that has been diluted with western thought and ideology and are not accurate according to historical records. In terms of *Mu Lan*, Disney is trying to use it to carry the message of feminism perhaps targeting the international Chinese community. The story of *Mu Lan* was fictional rather than historical. But one thing is certain that the original intent of writing up this story was based on confused doctrines which the idea of piety towards parents in mind. *Mu Lan* was a fictional story written during the Sung dynasty (960-1279). It portrayed a girl who answers the call of the military draft to defend her nation and to spare the life of her elderly father. Her action was based on the tradition of filial piety and patriotism. The Disney production team may have had this information but decided to ignore it, because the Chinese idea of piety and self-sacrifice is against Western ideas of individualism and liberalism. The values of individualism and liberalism prevail in the animation.

Orientalism and Occidentalism are based on insecurities when facing the unfamiliar. Interaction of culture or race has always been a process that harbors fear and sometimes

generates violence. This part of human nature is an element in all conflict. It has been based on difference of culture and difference of genetical appearance. In terms of art, the Otherness appears as the exotic object, a curiosity and a novelty of another culture. The perception of Otherness changes through time, and each stage of the understanding of others is accompanied by some degree of distortion. It is an interested construct of false existence rather than a disinterested record or academically impartial conjecture of reality.

The study of Otherness has been a common practice in human history. In contemporary terms, there is Otherness in every individual; every person has his or her own uniqueness and may be posited as a kind of marginal opposite. The act of trying to understand Otherness (as the marginal opposite) is a journey towards a true plural society, not just mere endurance or tolerance of difference; because understanding brings respect. Orientalism can be generalized in the wider context of Otherness that has little to do with any particular culture and race. These phenomena of territorialism and mass jealousy started from the very beginning of the formation of the first human tribes and first contacts since pre-history. Furthermore, the very first practice of imperialism resulted in the conquest of tribe and acquisition of human labor and wealth. It seems to be a common practice in human history.

The 'Orient' has been a fascination of the West since early classical times. This perception of the East was rather a superficial one, because there was minimal contact between both sides. In addition, the East had the same kind of allure towards the West. It was based on an imaginative and narrative, very much the outcome of cultural perceptions. It was also

fear of the unknown and the need for satisfying imaginative impulses. The interchange between the two sides of the earth all seems so innocent, as if it is all based on human curiosity and sharing. And, still for some, there seems nothing very problematic with Orientalism. Nor does anything seem very problematic with the practice of Occidentalism. But, in terms of Orientalism, the problem lies in the phenomena of European colonial expansion, armed with military and technological superiority, arrogating to itself the symbols whose relevance to the conquered territory it has largely effaced. The Orientalist translation of colonial others (including culture and people) has been motivated by a political agenda. It becomes troublesome because the colonized have been portrayed and interpreted for the purpose of control and of an objectified colonial culture in world history and in the eyes of European citizens.

Roger Sandall is right about 'Orientalist' practice as I have quoted him in the beginning of this chapter. The world is constructed as a 'masquerade' of cultural imageries.

Materiality and Sculpture Making.

Craft knowledge is merely mechanical.

Craft knowledge can be learned as and when you need it.

Craft knowledge and 'having ideas' or 'being creative' are separate activities.

Craft knowledge is separable from making aesthetic judgments.

Craft knowledge is rule-based and rules conflict with personal creativity.

Craft knowledge is about forming habits, and habits also conflict with or inhibit creativity.

Prejudices about craft knowledge by Peter Dormer.[1]

The use of the chosen material in sculpture has been a key preoccupation among artists from the Arts & Crafts Movement to contemporary times. Different materials will require different skills and arouse different cognition when viewed. 'When an aesthetic consummation is expressed through the arrangement of material in order so that the arranged material becomes a medium embodying the aesthetic consummation, an art product is created.'[2] Thus, the use of sculptural materials is consciously or unconsciously fastened to artistic intentions. The material was perhaps not under much scrutiny before a

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[1] Dormer, P. *The Art of the Maker,* Thames and Hudson, London, 1994, p 8.
[2] Van Camp, J. *Creating Works of Art From Works of Art: The Problem of Derivative Works,* Journal of Arts Management, Law & Society, Fall 94, Vol. 24 Issue 3, p 209, 14 p.

large array of materials and tools became available and readily processable during the industrial period. The notion of the ready-made has further widened the definition of sculpture. These changes have allowed sculptural form to be read not only on the basis of how it is presented but also according to its materiality.

Conversely, those post-Duchamp found - objects have brought upon contemporary sculptures a new kind of scrutiny. That is the question of craftsmanship and the significance of materials. Michael Carter has argued:

> The meaning of art object is that all art making rests upon a set of material substrates, each of which have their own distinctive histories...these histories of art's material substrates would lie at the very deepest level. That these dimensions are so often overlooked or ignored in contemporary art histories is due, I think, to the fact that the most frequent way in which we encounter art objects today is in the form of reproduction.[3]

Today, a great deal of sculpture no longer adheres to its laborious tradition. It exists mostly in the form of 'assembly' of ready-made objects. Installation has become the norm of sculptural making, and the material - with all its symbolic meanings–is less relevant to the overall meaning of sculpture. Dormer also mentioned:

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[3] Carter, M. *Framing Art,* Hale and Iremonger NSW, 1993, p 64.

Within the plastic arts, the status of craft knowledge or tacit knowledge has declined sharply because it is held to have no intrinsic value. A number of factors have encouraged the flight from tacit knowledge: the development of reductionist abstract art, the widespread use of installation, performance and other non-traditional, non-craft-based media, and the substitution of craft knowledge with art theory as the unifying body of knowledge taught as fine arts in Western art schools.[4]

To some extent, if the sculptor is capable of the traditional crafts, the spectator will most likely assume that the sculpture has either been commissioned or is an assembly of found objects, not genuinely made by the sculptor. Therefore, within the body of the work created, I have used direct construction methods such as modeling, joinery, carving and casting. These methods belong to the traditional methods of sculpture making. I have taken every opportunity to use whatever technology the present day can offer; but the underlying sensibility in the works relates to an interest in the properties and associations of the materials. Technology does not discount the authenticity of this particular sculptural production associated with tradition. As accepted by William Morris and others, 'technology' simply takes away the work that is involved with processing hard materials.

The choice of timber for structural construction for this visual inquiry is based on a number of reasons. One is its availability, because being a self - funded sculptor, my

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[4] Dormer, P. *The Art of the Maker*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1994, p 25.

budget in most circumstances dictates the selection of material used. The character of timber is another reason. It has many properties that suit forms with large amounts of structural stress, which is ideal for making models of architecture. It is also able to hold desirable details. Other materials such as plaster, metal and *papier mache* cannot rival the ways in which timber can be manipulated due to the availability of power tools and the manageable weight and its strength when come to transporting form place to place. But there are also reasons of cultural and technological history, reaching back to the archaic roots of Western convention, that favor timber construction; and these ancient circumstances parallel the patterns of building in ancient China.

The image of the ancient Greek temple is widely employed in this research. During its construction, a fundamental question arises. Why use timber to represent architecture from ancient times that was apparently built in marble? Indeed, all the temples - now mostly ruins - of the Graeco-Roman Mediterranean, were constructed in marble or other stones (in Rome, sometimes brick with marble revetment). Some may suspect a falsehood of material chosen for the representation of a Greek temple in this research. The assumption of falsehood could potentially discredit the sculpture as an unsophisticated replica. However, the origins of ancient Greek temples justify the choice. The first Greek temples are likely to have been made in wood. There is no concrete evidence to be found because no wooden architecture could have withstood the destruction of the elements since the time of antiquity; however, at East from the time of Gohfried Semper there is a common archaeological consent on the issue. The ruins of the

first temple of Hera at Samo (eighth century) might constitute archaeological proof, because wooden posts were used instead of stone.[5] The ornaments - especially triglyphs and metopes and fluting—suggest that timber was perhaps the material used to build the very first Greek temples (see page 36 and 37).Greek Columns and moldings were closely related to different parts of the trees used. Sir John Summerson has argued, using Lucie Laugier's theory an eighteenth century French architect:

The established hypothesis of all architectural theorists was that architecture had originated when primitive man built himself a primitive hut. From the hut he went on to the temple and, refining continually on the temple formula, he invented the timber version of the Doric and the copied it in stone. The other orders followed.[6]

Summerson further mentions the idea of primitivism. Searching back to the true, untainted sources of architectural beauty is also the contention of Laugier's theory,[7] that timber legitimated the use of ornaments and reaffirmed a sense of association with nature. The Greek temple ruins that we see today were stone versions of their wooden ancestors. This point is commonly assumed in the teaching of architecture. Ian Sutton has firmly stated that:

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[5] Coulton, J. J. *Ancient Greek Architects at Work*, Cornell University Press, New York, 1977, p 32.
[6] Summerson, J. *The classical Language of Architecture*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1991, P 91.
[7] Ibid. p 95.

13. the Laugier's Essai Sur l'
Architecture, 1753.

Source, Summerson, J. *The Classical
Language of Architecture*, Thams and
Hudson, London, 1963, p 98.
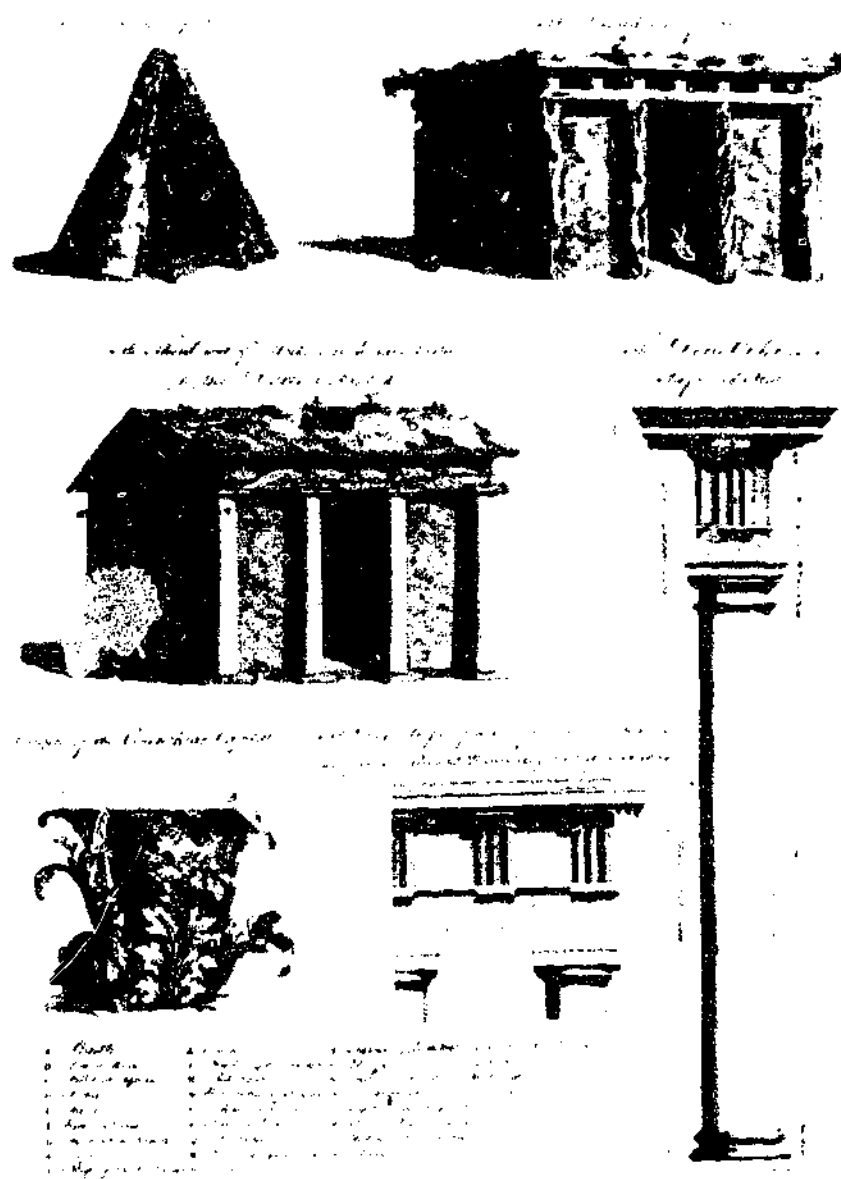
14. Sir William Chambers's Treatise of 1795.

Source, Summerson, J. *The Classical Language of
Architecture*, Thams and Hudson, London, 1963,
p 98.
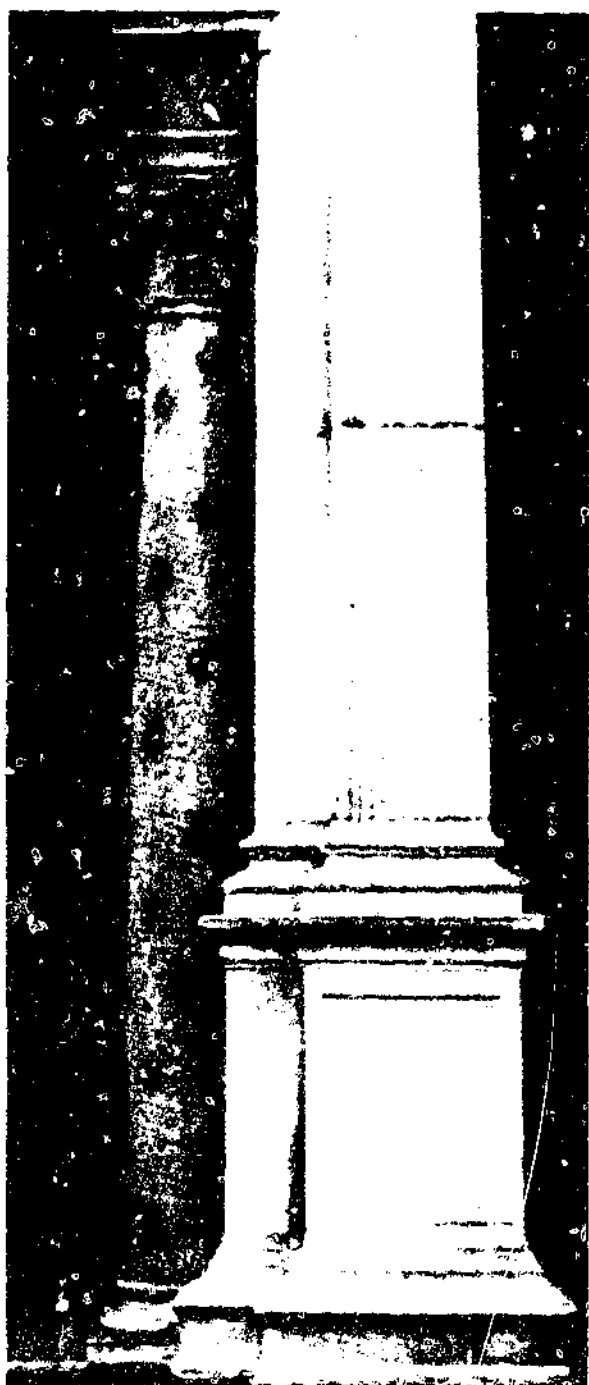
15. A 'rustic' column by Bramante in the cloister of S.
Ambrogio, Milan.

Source, Summerson, J. *The Classical Language of
Architecture*, Thams and Hudson, London, 1963, p 98.

37

17. A scared tree aedicule of Artemis.
Source, Hersey, G. *The Lost Meaning of Classical architecture*, the MIT Press, London, 1989, pp12-15.

16. Francesco di Giorgio, Column and tree From the Saluzziano Codex, Biblioteca Reale, Turin, folio 15r.
Source, Hersey, G. *The Lost Meaning of Classical architecture*, the MIT Press, London, 1989, pp12-15.
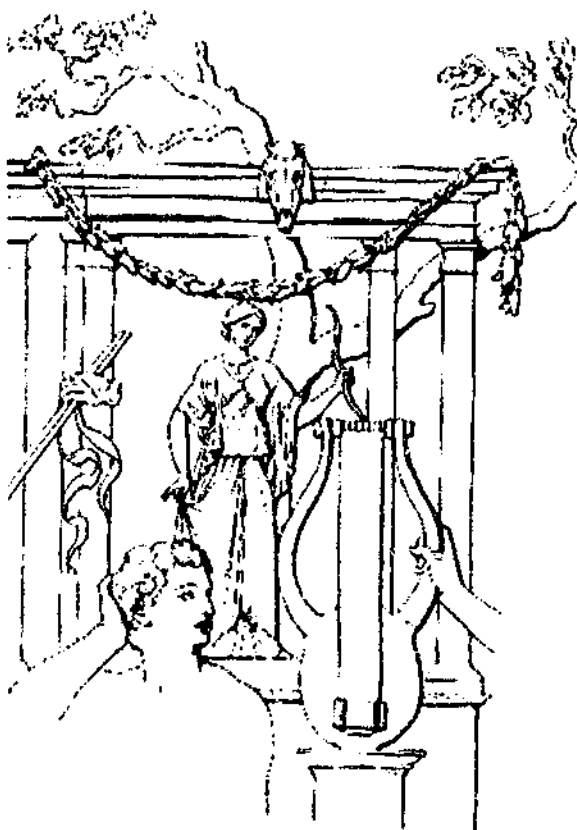
18. From Carl Boetticher, Der Baumkultus der Hellenen 1856.
Source, Hersey, G. *The Lost Meaning of Classical architecture*, the MIT Press, London, 1989, pp12-15.

The earliest temples were of wood, and that the stone structures that succeeded them were masonry versions of timber originals. This explains several features that would otherwise be puzzling. The capital was originally a piece of timber between a vertical post and a horizontal beam. The pediment was the gable-end of the roof. The cornice was the eaves. The triglyphs were decorated ends of the beams. The guttae were pegs or nails.[8]

The wooden representations of Greek temples of this research are not just reproductions of architectural forms that were made according to their original intent from the age of ancient Greece. Timber is one of the primary materials alongside stone that helped to shape human civilizations. In China, most preserved ancient architecture is constructed in wood, because stone was not readily available as it was for its European counterparts. In addition, timber construction is far cheaper than stone and requires less human labor. The wooden representations in my work reflect the origins of Greek temples rather than their official standing from classical times to conventional nineteenth-century adaptations and presents an underling parallel to the Chinese construction tradition. This material kinship from archaic times – now largely lost – is once of the paradoxes that I would like to embrace.

There are also environmental reasons. Most of the work created was made from reclaimed timber. This is due to an awareness of the reduction of forest originally

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[8] Sutton, I. *Western Architecture: A survey from Ancient Greece to the Present*, Thames & Hudson, New York, 1999, p 34.

covering the earth. Using reclaimed material suits my philosophy, for apart from ecological grounds, there is something poetic in the 'recycling' of images as well as materials. It amounts to a personal choice.

All sculpture constructed was intended for interior presentation. The timber structures will not be displayed outdoors as they will disintegrate in the elements in a time of months. The disintegration of sculpture is not part of this artistic intent. They are made for interior display; indeed, in evoking the scale, function and material quality of furniture, they may also signify a domesticated cultural significance, reducing their ancient monumentality to the condition of household consumables. The miniaturization of once-mighty and significant forms of architecture to household commodity may allude to the trivialization of cultural identity in the processes of moving from East to West and back again in inscrutable transfers. And again mere is a paradox, because the 'belittling' of the temple as small object invites a contemplation of the dignity of furniture.

Different finishes that are applied to the timber bear different conceptual properties. Most surfaces will show the defects of reclaimed timber. The material is defective by its very nature and needs no concealment. Further, the imperfections of workmanship as recommended by nineteenth - century theorists like John Ruskin will also be shown or at lEast not denied. The applications of paint and stain will have a different purpose in each individual works.

Remaking Greek temples (albeit with great symbolic license) with reclaimed timber may also be a way of revisiting John Ruskin's famous polemic against Greek architecture in

favor of what he imagined to be the indigenous style of England, namely Gothic. According to his outlook, the Greek temple was rigidly designed by an architect, who then required the craftsman to be a slave in faithfully carrying out the designer's instructions. The results are perfect symmetry and finish. But in Gothic, Ruskin argued, the craftsman provides the keynote to the church, leaving his imprint everywhere, creating not just the detail but the whole form. Gothic design is wayward, for it rejects the slavery of the mason in favor of the freedom of the artist or craftsman, who confesses his imperfections. In rebuilding the temples in wood, I would also align myself with Ruskin's critique of authoritarian modes of construction.

All wood structures in the research were constructed using traditional wood working methods such as tennon and mortise joints. All joints are glued together without using nails. This is a result of a fondness of traditional woodworking and a fascination with technical skills. However, there are exceptions such as end-grain joinery, because it is undesirable to expose the end grain due to different rates of shrinkage resulting in an unevenness of the timber surface. This was caused by defects in reclaimed timber and its unpredictable size. Many of the defects of the timber used are not concealed according to woodworking tradition. It is part of the artistic intent to manifest the politics that relate to the interpretation of cultural objects rather than to put forward a faithful reproduction of classical perfection.

All sculpture was made by me as sole producer without other contractors, because I believe sculpture needs to be produced through the manipulation of materials by one's
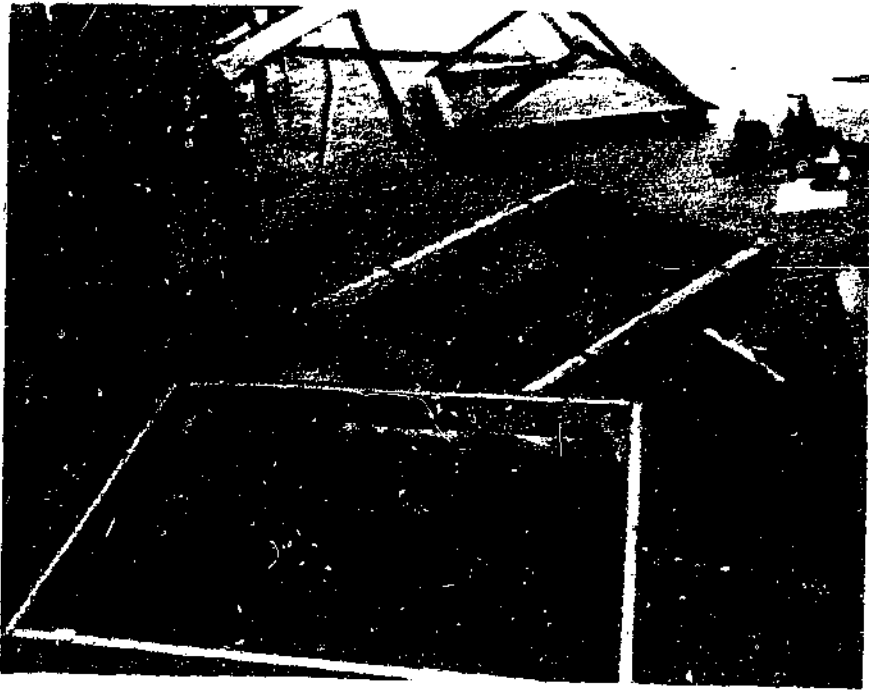
19.
Various of 'carcasses' made for
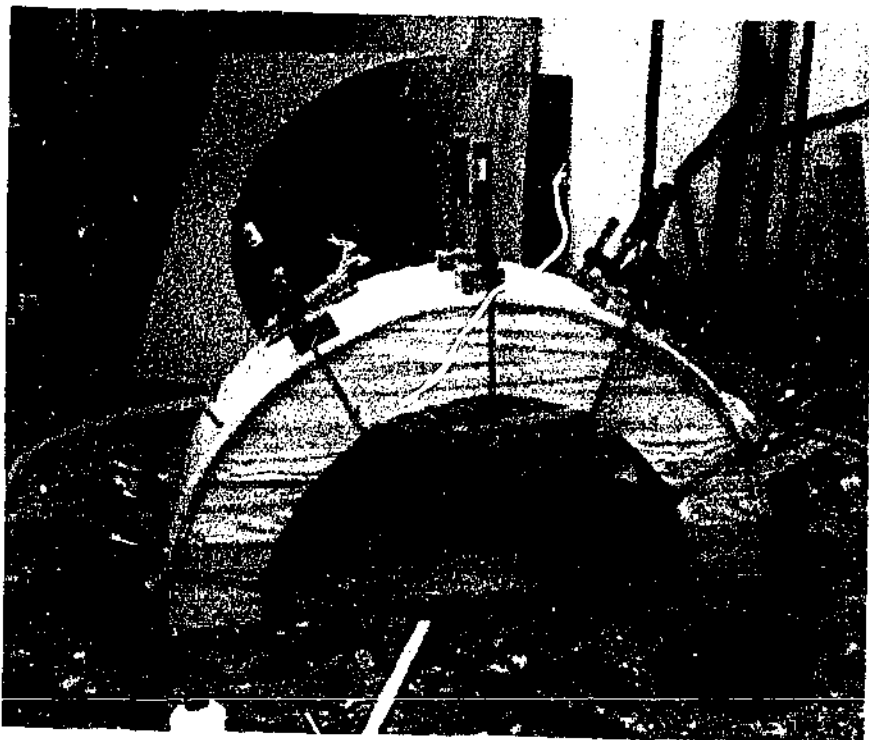different Greek temple roofs.

20.
The making of *Dovetail of Conventions*.

21.
Upper structure of R*ipple*.

22.
Modeling of R*uin*.
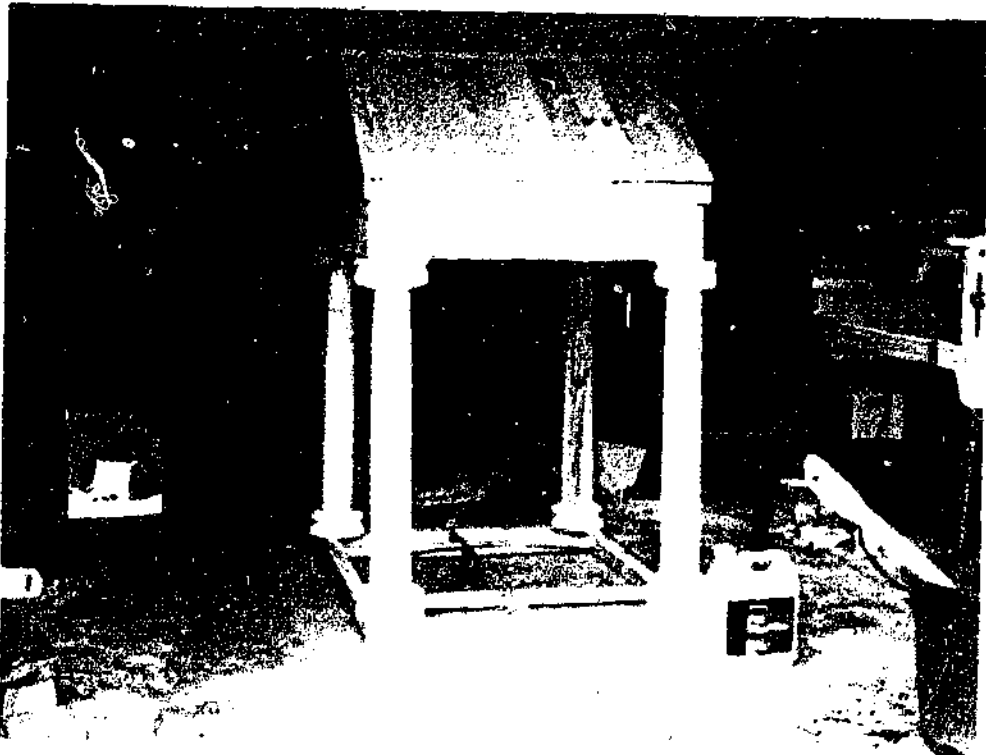
23.
Arch made for *Dovetail of Cconventions*.

24.
Upper structure for
China Shop.

42

own hand, and I would take no joy in the result if it were otherwise. I have neither an intention of defying the notion of the ready-made nor the method of contracting others to produce my work.

Although trained in the modernist tradition I have not created sculptures in the Modernist tradition that stand on their own, that are wholly autonomous as form; for my work refers to cultural precedents. Representation of cultural artifacts is the core of this visual research, and all of them are created as reflections on cultural archetypes. As a result, I cannot easily escape a Modernist critique. Modernism has proliferated through most of the world's artistic population, including Asian. One of the underling intention of Modernism was to separate from the tradition of representation and the tradition of ornamentation. This research however, has gone in the opposite direction from the Modernist aesthetics and philosophy and, along with a great number of other work which could broadly be termed postmodern, repudiates what Bernard Smith has summarized as the Formalesque. The modern movement, which reads all historical progress in favor of a universal homogenization of culture under the aegis of purity of form, is especially remote from my preoccupations. The various traditions of abstraction (in which I was brought up with due rigor and chastity) and the minimalism are, for the time being, disavowed, because representation is essential for historical relevance when cultural perception is the substance of these sculptural objects.

But I am not without ties to some traditions of Modernism, especially when modern art first appeared in society as 'anxious objects'[9]. These modernist objects do not process much reference to human society yet they claim high philosophical and aesthetic values, sometimes with great psychoanalytical pertinence and seduction. The Modernist movement and its objects present a profound challenge to human societies by their disassociation with convention. The twentieth century can almost be regarded as the century of Modernism, although it has been through its high and lows and ended with a degree of renunciation in postmodernism. Its influence is prominent throughout most art institutions worldwide. Modernist influences are fading but it is still a force to be reckoned with when comes to critical aesthetic perception of art objects. Depending on the ever-contentious definitions, the sculptures that were produced as a result of this research can ironically be perceived as anxious objects of Modernism.

The success of New Classicism has demonstrated that the promised twentieth-century artistic revolution, like so many of this century's radicalisms, ended in the 1980s. There was a time when I thought: with the burden of Modernist history cast off, New Classicism can breathe freer and more invigorating air.[10] But I no longer see our contemporary circumstances in terms of the wholesale rejection of Modernism. I feel that postmodernism, with all the cultural references that Modernism shunned, is nevertheless always in a dialogue with Modernism.

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[9] Gablik, S. *Has Modernism Failed,* Thames and Hudson, New York, 1984, p 36.
[10] Adam, R. *'the Radiance of the Past'* in Papadkis, A & Watson, H *New Classicism,* Rizzoi, New York, 1990, p 80.

My particular sculpture production relies on so-called craft knowledge. The skill required years to master through an old-fashioned master and apprentice system. Contemporary art teaching cannot offer such kinds of training because of the lack of time and energy; and sometimes, for that reason, I even feel that there is something archaic in my works, almost by default. As the sole maker of these sculptures, I am conscious that I might present as the pre-modern master from the colonial past whose production in certain respects I would critique.

The perception of the sculptural form and its material is attached to historical meanings. My intent remains personal and I feel that it would falsify the project to suggest that it is ideologically-driven, in the same way that it cannot be seen as mechanical extension of the sculptures' material properties. I would love to think that there is a metaphysical dimension to the works, in which their ontological 'being' is posited in the three-way tension between the political (chiefly orientalist appropriation), the personal (my history as a migrant artist) and the conventional (the rival traditions of classicism and Modernism); but I fear that this discourse requires greater faith in the work than the terms of research indicate and I must leave this hope to others who might see some virtue in the work.

Part One

Perception of the Land

Dovetail of Conventions
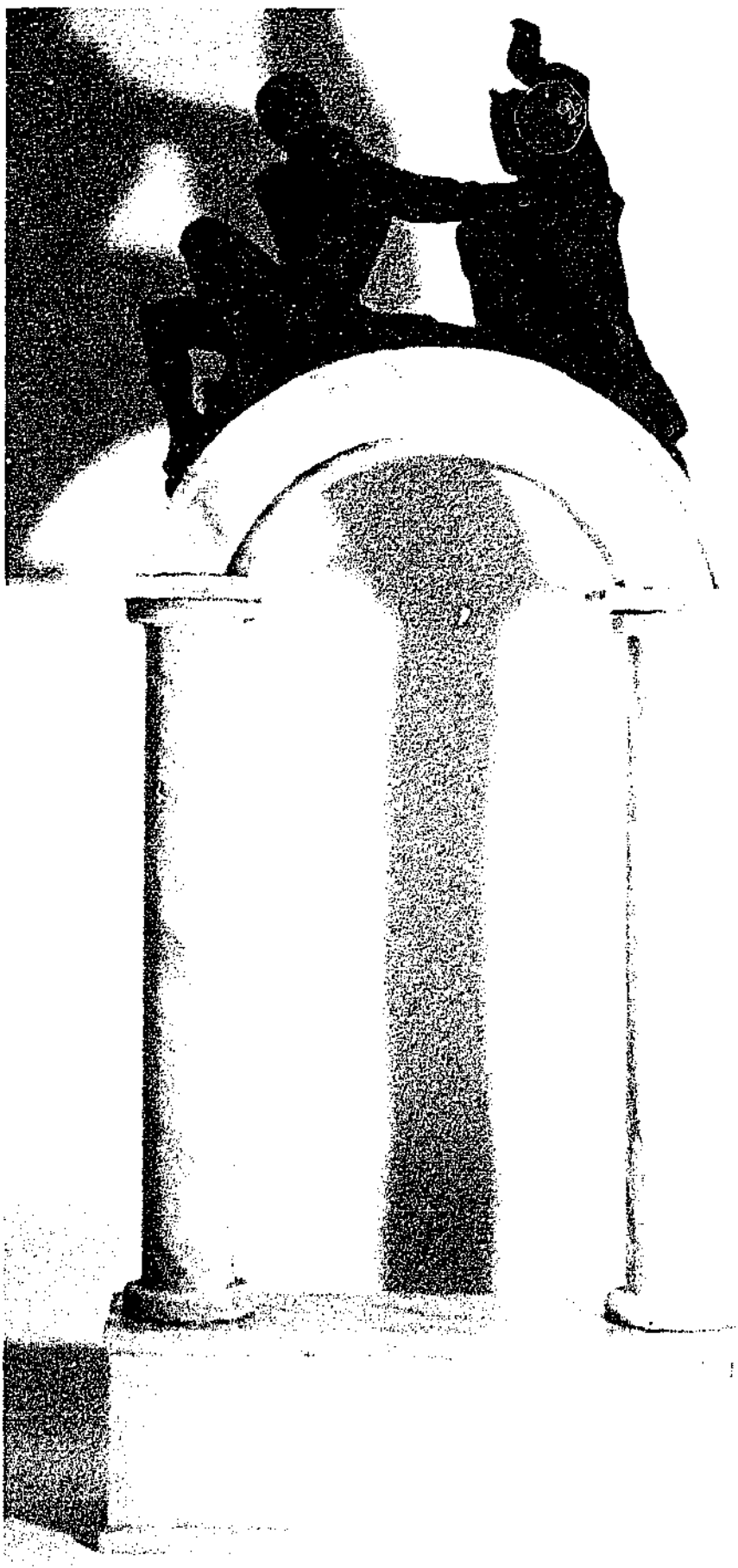
25.
Dovetail of Conventions
Fiberglass and assorted timber.
234 x 36 x 132cm
2001

The situation regarding immigration in Australia and worldwide is in a state of flux and involves many adaptations of the unfamiliar. *Dovetail of Conventions* was initially created with the confrontation of culture in mind. It is obvious that there are two figures fighting on top of a Roman arch. In the light of the dominant theme of this research, the first assumption may be that it is a confrontation between East and West, an interpretation that could all too easily become a cliché.

Two figures on top of the arch can be seen as man and woman by the conventional

symbolic language of old academic sculpture. Perched on top of an arch could be seen as a representation of unity. While the arch also symbolizes the harmony of the balance of an architectural structure, it also signals the coming together of two principles both vertical but proceeding in opposite directions and resolving their contrary energies with perfection in the circular increments which theoretically make a horizontal stage at the top. But *Dovetail of Conventions* does not quite satisfy this reading. The two figures are antagonistic, and their untoward confrontational attitude poses a contradiction in a
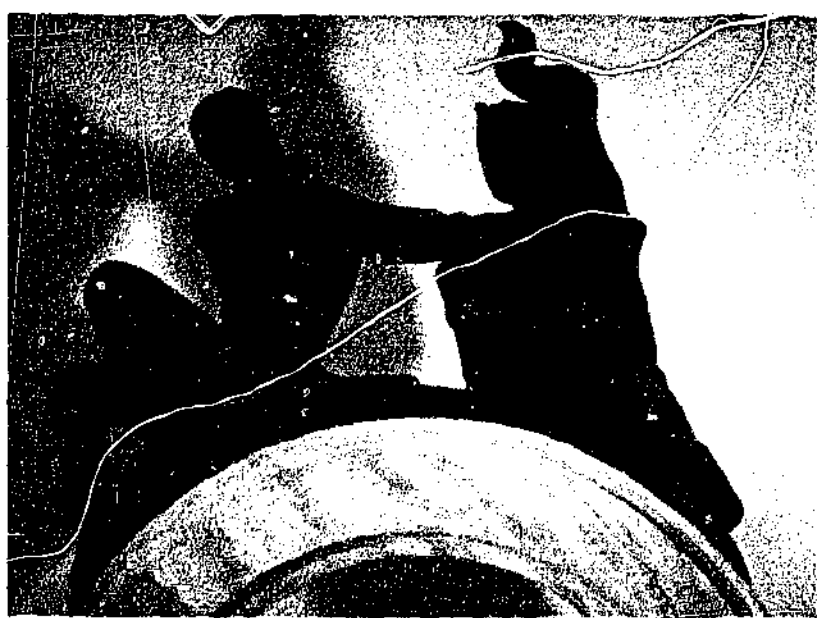
26.
Closeup of the sculpture.

context in which classical or triumphal harmony might be expected to prevail.

The male figure on the left is portrayed in a manner according to Western classical traditions. He is also only partially covered by drapery that belongs to celebration and representation of the human body is the natural beauty of the classical tradition. In addition, however, the facial expression is in a state of pain and the eyes are tightly closed due to the indecorous or unseemly belligerence of the two figures. Their position, I suggest, is inappropriate, untoward, hysterical and scandalous. I imagined them stationed on a plinth of great privilege, upon which they have nothing to do but quarrel with precarious violence.

Conversely, the figure on the right is idealized and fully covered. In fact, it was

48

modeled from an ancient Buddhist statue. It is not necessarily a representation of the female body but rather a neutral representation of both sexes. Exposure of the body was not allowed or at least not celebrated in various Asian communities. This attitude towards the human body, almost Victorian, is also a Confucian and Buddhist (rather than Hindu) tradition. Buddhism did not originate in China but it is now well assimilated - one could say - in the legacy of the Confucian consciousness. Consequently, I initially intended to portray a common representation and perhaps an Orientalist assumption of Asian culture. It is a common prejudice that Western people are far more expressive than Asians are, according to which the Asian physiognomy and decorous reserve are interpreted as inscrutable. Therefore, it represents the core of Western consciousness. Humanism is perhaps an appropriate description of this representation that the West in general is less hesitant to reveal human weakness as well as the beauty and strength of the body.

The image of Buddha in the West is now a form of Orientalist cliché. Many artists in Asia have used this form of cliché as a metaphor of the irony of the postcolonial cultural condition. Many of the sacred Buddha statues were removed from their religious sites during European colonial expansion and displayed as cultural artifacts. Although, Buddhism has gained in popularity since the 1950s in the West as an alternative to the flaws of the Western life style, we cannot ignore the fact that for many, it is a mere decoration without any religious significance.

Ever since the construction of the first human shelter, the opening of either a hut or any primitive housing structure was related to matters of the family a gateway to domestic living. When it is closed, it allows mysterious conception of whatever happens inside.

But most of all, it gives the viewer a sense of warmth and safety when such an opening is mounted on the structure of family occupation. But this domestic association (perhaps supported by a bickering heterosexual couple) must be offset by the institutional associations of a Roman arch, a great symbol of imperial authority, in which the gateway signaled the franchise of the state and cultural or political homogeneity.

A gate or a doorway does not only allow for conventional imagination, but its underlining property is the condition of entry and a challenge into the unfamiliar. In many respects the decoration of an entrance gives a hint of what is inside. Premodern and even modern houses in the West or in Asia often have some sort of decoration such as the stone lion of traditional houses in China. They are used for warding off bad spirits and as a symbol of power and stature that varies according to the style and size of the stone lion.

The architectural structure in this sculpture symbolizes a gateway to another cultural existence. There is a Chinese saying regarding the learning of skills or any knowledge, which is translated to 'after the master has guided you through the door, your destiny is in your hands'. It means the teaching of knowledge is by bringing one through a knowledge base, a gate. How well students perform will depend on their own initiative. Gateways, like the stoa or aula, might be seen as symbols of induction into wisdom. The gate of *Dovetail of Conventions* might imply the Diasporic experience as a path for the reconstitution of one's own cultural belongings. But if so, superintended by what wisdom?

The door or the entrance in the culture of China has a cultural significance. A door's structural setting represents a large array of meanings regarding the occupant's stature wealth and social importance. Most importantly, it had been used with an architectural style to represent the hierarchy of the Chinese dynastic court. Therefore the style that was involved in the construction of an entrance had a certain order that needed to be followed without any mistakes, or the punishment would mean certain death. Despite the 'order' that represents the Chinese imperial command structure, the doorway has been mostly used to describe the state of family in Chinese language. The word 'door' is used with a verb for many different situations.[1] These idioms relate to the meaning of 'family honor', 'family future', 'family pride', 'family style', and 'family rule' without the use of the word 'family'. Hence the door in Chinese becomes a representation for one's family and ancestry. In Chinese tradition, one could say, the door has personal associations as well as social ones.

The arch in architectural terms is a sophisticated structure of carved wedge-shaped blocks (called voussoirs) that span an opening and are only supported from two sides[2]. Such structures can be used to represent balance and harmony. Because, for such a structure to be constructed in stone, its weight must be supported by the pillars from the two sides and each stone that forms the arc much join snuggly or the structure will not hold. The arch is an architectural marvel cultivated, if not invented, by the Romans that transfers weights from the top of the opening through a semicircle to the vertical support of the arch (the columns or piers). This structure was used to build aqueducts and stone bridges. In the history of Western architecture the arch was not unknown to

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[1] Lou, C-S. *The Culture of Doors in Chinese Architecture*, Artists, Taipei, 2000, p 8.

[2] Banister, F. *A History of Architecture*, The Athlone Press, London, 1975, p 1312.

the Greeks but the Romans exploited this apparently Etruscan invention. The circle, semicircle and half-sphere became the principal geometric figures upon which Roman architecture was based.[3] The use of the arch in China on the other hand did not have the prominence of its Western counterparts but is nevertheless, well known even by the orientalist imagination through gently curving bridges and so on. It was due to the fact that Chinese buildings were mostly built in timber that the arch had less structural relevance when it came to building a door way. By and large, these followed the trabeated conventions of timber temples which reflected ancient indigenous designs and modes of constructions.

Hence, the arch in this work symbolizes for me a sense of crucial balance and a bridging structure from the supporting two columns. Moreover, the arched doorway has another meaning linked to the sense of home. Most classical home entrances in the West have this opening structure. A home is meant to be harmonious and calm, a place of refuge from matters out side one's own home and a place for recuperation. The arch is like a bridge linking a binary entity together in unanimity.

A binary relationship is a key concept in this sculpture that is extended to many of our existences. The gate that is portrayed in this sculpture represents another intended meaning. It is an entry into the realm of binary conditioning. In the situation of Diaspora the road to a new 'country' for some can be as simple as going through customs and presenting papers. For others, it means months in a turbulent sea or years in detention centers. This journey to a 'new land' is a journey of mental and physical struggle. It is a journey through a gate that will force a judgment on one's existence as

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[3] Foster, M. *The Principles of Architecture*, Phaidon, Oxford, 1982, p 36.

a person and one's own cultural belongings.

The metaphor for the binary relationship is between the East and the West, Chinese and West, us and them. The two figures on top of the arch might illustrate a warning of an internal conflict. The conflict can be on a greater scale such as civilizational or to a lesser extent a conflict in one's own mind. If we were living in a mono-cultural world there may not be any conflicts and of course not a great deal of invention and discovery because there would only be one identity. There would be only us and no them, and otherness would become meaningless. However, such a world could not exist due to human nature. Culture is inherently schismatic. We tend to self-divide, even within small tribal units; otherness can still be broken down to you and me.

The gate that this sculpture represents, is an equal base without the concern of technological advancement; it consists of two columns that stand for the elevation of human culture. The arch is like a bridge that allows a meeting of different cultures. Whenever there is extensive contact between humans of racial or cultural difference, the result is mostly in the form of conflict or conquest.

Human differences are a phenomenon that can be minimized so we can live for the common good. Or, it can be exaggerated, allowing many forms of imagination that will, in many ways, lead to overly defined boundaries. A nation state is such a defined boundary, but in this mobilized world with a high rate of migration and immigration, national boundaries are in no way blurred but become focused in each individual that belongs to a certain cultural membership. Professor Samuel P. Huntington has explored human cultural differences in his book *The Clash of Civilizations*, in which he classifies

humans into seven civilizational groups. They are Sinic (Chinese), Japanese, Hindu, Islamic, Orthodox, Latin American and African[4]. This classification does not conform to conventional national borderlines. Instead it focuses on the fundamental differences of human culture. Each civilisation is not separated by a geographical divide but the classifications can be used to identify the differences of individuals in the situation of a multicultural society.

Huntington in an early chapter of his book dismissed the notion of common moralities in different cultures as an indication of a universal civilization. He believes that Western values are only shared by people of "Davos Culture"[5] within Western civilization[6]. This Davos culture is thought to be practiced in the Modern nations of the West. It is also a wedge-point to widen the gap between the West and the rest of the world. It is clear that Huntington's view is somewhat shared by the United States government because he is one of the advisors of Foreign Affairs. His thesis may well have an effect on the United States foreign politics. The outcomes of such attitudes can be catastrophic, because Huntington does not promote the sense of co-existence and harmony but emphasizes differences and separation among his chosen civilizational categories. In his view, the West means to rule and dictate the path of a Western moral high ground. He further attacks multiculturalism and says, "Multiculturalism at home threatens the United States and the West; universalism abroad threatens the West and the world. Both deny the uniqueness of Western culture".[7] We can hear an echo from the calling of Australia's One Nation Party and La Pen in France. However, most

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[4] Huntington, S. P. *The Clash of civilizations*, A Touchstone Book, New York, 1997,pp 45-46
[5] Davos Culture refers to World Economic Forum held in Davos, Switzerland. Huntington refers to people who attend this forum are the believers of individualism, market economies and political democracy.
[6] Huntington, S. P. *The Clash of Civilizations*, A Touchstone Book, New York, 1997, pp 56-58.
[7] Ibid. p 318.

profoundly Huntington has devised seven recommendations for Western civilization in the face of declining Western power. He states,

-To achieve greater political, economic, and military integration and to coordinate their policies so as to preclude states from other civilizations exploiting differences among them;

-To incorporate into the European Union and NATO the Western states of Central Europe that is, the Visegrad countries, the Baltic republics, Slovenia and Croatia;

-To encourage the "Westernization" of Latin America and, as far as possible, the close alignment of Latin American countries with the West;

-To restrain the development of the conventional and unconventional military power of Islamic and Sinic countries.

-To slow the drift of Japan away from the West and toward accommodation with China;

-To accept Russia as the core state of Orthodoxy and a major regional power with legitimate interests in the security of its southern borders;

-To maintain Western technological and military superiority over other civilizations;

-And, most important, to recognize that Western intervention in the affairs of other civilizations is probably the single most dangerous source of instability and potential global conflict in a multicivilizational world.[8]

Huntington's book was first published in 1996 where it has aroused many critiques but,

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[8] Huntington, S. P. *The Clash of Civilizations*, A Touchstone Book, New York, 1997, pp 312-13.

now his method has been realized by both senior and junior Bush administrations in the war against Iraq (and perhaps the rest of the non Western world). The incident in which the two-suicide passenger planes that plunged into the World Trade Center in New York September 11th 2001, favours Huntington's 'clash' theory. However, his thesis poses many dangers. 'In such situations the rhetoric of the inability of peoples who see themselves as culturally distinct to coexist peacefully, can become the reality...it could be misleading simply to recognize that civilizational difference as the cause of conflict'[9]. Indeed, the thesis goes against classical Marxist theory, for example, which sees conflict as having a material or economic basis. Moreover Huntington's type of political doctrine seems to see the civilizational difference as a prevention of coexistence. In fact, as previously discussed, East and West were not different entirely: for example, 'Islam's notions of rationalism, monotheism and science were the starting point of Western civilization today'[10]. Different civilizations might not have the exact same root but through history the poles of *us and them* have benefited from the complementary oppositions. What Huntington has suggested is a way of 'justifying the crimes of imperialism as the product of cultural incompatibility'[11]. As one wishes to believe his voice, there is an echo of colonial rhetoric and a renewed 'white man's burden'.

Dovetail of Conventions, however, is not a direct allegorical presentation of the 'clash' theory but this unpleasant discourse is nevertheless a source of its motivation. I believe I have made my case that this binary cultural and civilizational relationship is a matter

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[9] O'Hagan, J. *Civilisational Conflict?* Looking for Cultural Enemies, Third World Quarterly, Mar 95, Vol. 16 Issue 1, p 19, 20 p.
[10] Mazarr, M. J. *Culture and International Relations*, Current, May 96 Issue 382, p 23, 9 p.
[11] Amin, s. *Imperialism and Culturalism Complement Each Other*, Monthly Review, An Independent Socialist Magazine, June 96, Vol. 48 Issue 2, p 1, 11 p.

of conflict. It can only be aggravated if one wishes to emphasis cultural difference. And yet difference exists and conflict exists and they need, somehow, to be countenanced. In many ways, I see the diaspora as the lynchpin in the negotiation between global hostility and moral and artistic inclusiveness; for it embraces elements of both.

Diaspora is a condition and a mindset. People are predetermined that newcomers are not always welcome. The newcomers are only allowed entry for reasons that will benefit the hosting nation. Otherwise the treatment of unbeneficial subjects will be hostile. The condition of diaspora is undefined. It requires an entry into a binary realm in either a physical or a physiological form. The difference is among us and will always be there to haunt us. The only change is in its severity due to the way society handles human difference.

The arch is supported by two columns that present a structural harmony forming a conceptual bridge so the conventions meet and the two figures perform in an act of quarrel. Where once we might have admired a Roman arch as the acme of classical harmony, we are now more likely to see it as the symbol of imperialism, of cultural arrogance and military prowess. My gesture of installing conflict at the cusp might also be understood in terms of a dialectical spirit (an essential contention) riddling each conceit of harmony. In a sense, *Dovetail of Conventions* might stand against symbolist interpretations of gates and doorways which became tinted with pessimism in early Modernist times, as in Rodin's *Gates of Hell*. In my work, however, the redemptive force of a humanist Thinker type is not offered, for the conceptual richness of any contemplation of the current predicament would not be realized in an image of heroism,

Western, Eastern or anything in between.

Soil

27.
Soil
Fiberglass and timber
67 x 124 x 46 cm
2002

The Chinese Diaspora is perceived by me as a passive colonisation of inhabitable lands. It is passive because there were no plans and no organisations to pursue a governmental dominance and eradicate the inhabitants that were already there. One can argue that Chinese Diaspora is not colonisation but a migration because of the lack of governmental organization. That is why I intend to use this passiveness as the underlying rhetoric of the Chinese Diasporic experience.

The time of the gold rush witnessed the impact that Chinese workers brought to a colonial land. During such time, Chinese gold diggers were mostly minding their own business and paying less or no attention to the 'white settlers'. They went to gold mines that were far away from home (around San Francisco and Melbourne) to earn their share

of treasure; then, when they did, they would return home in most cases. They had no real desire to socialize with others or pose a threat to them. Due to this inward approach and the way they worked, they earned more money (compared to other colonial workers); unfortunately, due to their difference in appearance and language, they became the victims of differences.

In give its title I am conveying the state of Chinese Diaspora through the perception of the Australian land. Australian soil has nurtured the Aborigines in a relationship where the earth suffers no visible degradation. After the European settlement, the impact of the destructive forces imposed by Western civilization infested this continent so that 'a desolate landscape was transformed into a meaningless social space, giving the West a moral right to usurp its wasted resources.'[1] Later waves of other civilizations came to join the destruction of Australian soil.

Land is a conceptually passive entity that in most cases is prone to the abuse of human civilizations. It in many ways can be affiliated with the female in many cultures. 'Mother Earth' is perhaps the common sentiment that has been used regarding of my perception. In Chinese literature, Earth has been referring to as Ho Tu (literary meaning Empress Soil) an association with the notion of being feminine.   This could be related to other personification in Western tradition, mostly feminine nouns, such as in Greek (*ge, gaia*), Latin (*terra* or *tellus italica*) or German (*die Erde*). The female figure perhaps proposes

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[1] Crang, M. *Cultural Geography*, Routledge, London, 1998, p 75.

three different connotations in this work. One is the feminine as the land; the second is the passive others and the third is the female as the Western other. Mike Crang has clearly indicated that the relationship between the West and East has been a self-contradictive desire. 'There is a readily apparent geography of a West desiring a feminised East but as the object, not subject, of desires. Equally there is a fixation on boundaries and definitions.'[2] The depiction of the East in the eye of nineteenth-century artists was an indication of how eager they were to unleash their exotic desire on foreign cultures and subjects. In Crang's words:

> Westerners often expressed repugnance at polygamy, at the intrigue of the harem, at the idea of eunuchs and the decadence they felt it expressed. Western writers and artists returned to it as a subject over and over again. As a site of sexuality, often depicted with naked or semi-naked women (sometimes boys) it represented not just what was forbidden in Europe but also what was unobtainable about the East.[3]

Therefore, colonisation had not only given the European empires extra man power and material wealth, but a place where double standards were allowed either in colonial politics or in the forms of art. Hence, the feminised East was in essence turning the bulk of the non-European land and people into a cultural perceptual free zone. Colonialist fanaticism could be unhesitatingly unleashed at any time. This sculpture as its name

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[2] Crang, M. *Cultural Geography*, Routledge, London, 1998, p 75.

[3] Ibid. p 67.

implies, consists of three physical layers that represent different properties of the colonial landscape. The base can be seen as a geographical location and the earth, waiting for the ruins of the civilizational establishment. The female figure relates to the Western female and its passive equivalent (marginalized non-European subjects). The Chinese pergola is the presence of the Chinese in the West.

Migration was a rarity in Chinese history until European occupation and interior uprisings such as the Boxer Rebellion in China. Chinese did migrate to SouthEastern Asia during the Ming dynasty, but without becoming a dominant political force as Chinese people of the time apparently had no desire for power and had no political ambition. They had also departed without the backing of their nation. Therefore, Chinese migration (rather than colonisation) was passive, individual and non-institutional when compared to Western colonisation of most of the known world.

Chinese people who reside outside their native land have to live under the rule of the local government. The Chinese in Indonesia are a prime example where they are under such a tremendous oppression that they cannot keep their own name and own their own enterprises[4]. In the West, even in colonial times, the condition was much milder than in Indonesia but not without certain brutalities. They were, however, allowed to form their geographical imprint in a reservation. Kathryn Cornin in her book *colonial casualties* has stated:

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[4] It is known that any Chinese who wants to start a company can not register themselves as the owner of the company. The Indonesian law indicates that any Chinese owned company in the country must register under Indonesians with Indonesian names or the company will not be legitimate. Therefore, Chinese were forced to change their Chinese names.

The vulnerable, physically distinctive Chinese entered a society structurally and ideologically dominated by Europeans. Some quickly adopted colonial dress and manners and formed attachments to European women while others remained shut off from Victorian society and resisted colonial authority and the imposition of Christian values. The colonists, for their part, thought and spoke as if whiteness described the world. They dominated the Chinese by violence and beating, legally segregated them in 'protected' camps, instituted discriminatory administrative practices and anti-Chinese tax and employment laws and justified their actions by reference to racial theories and slogans which were transmitted from the United States and Europe.[5]

Chinatown is such a cultural imprint on the soil of Australia. The Chinese impact is preserved more in the armoury of anti-Chinese images, which many Australians carry with them to this day.[6] Anti-Asian or anti-Chinese is still a sentiment echoed in human memory. The perception of otherness in the Western consciousness has been described as a passive entity. *Soil*, as geographic entity, signifies the passiveness of otherness. Its identity is constructed by a dominant Western authority. Cultural perception is a double edged sword. It cuts on both sides. Whatever the construct of otherness during the colonial era is now coming back as a haunting historical memory, reminding us of the way we were and how far we have progressed since then.

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[5] Cornin, K. *Colonial Causalities*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 1982, p 2.
[6] Ibid. p 132.

Early Chinese miners were not antisocial in the eyes of the European miners. 'Chinese immigrants proved efficient, hard-working and perfectly capable of dealing with the peculiarities of European culture.'[7] It was their efficiency and hard work that posed a threat to the European miners. 'Cultural and racial differences were merely convenient ways of identifying and attacking what formed the point of view of the individual European immigrant trying to establish a sound economic base was soon perceived as economic enemy.'[8] All this anti-Chinese rhetoric has led to a point where the Chinese were used as leverage and a reason for the federation of Australia. The image of Australia portrayed by the cartoonist was coincidentally female. Because the artists who created such drawings wants to show the land of Australia as a vulnerable white female needing the protection of European masculinity. Moreover, the Chinese Diaspora has been described by colonial rhetoric as a kind of famine and peril 'running the health of White Australia'[9]. In a cartoon that ballyhoos the federation of Australia by the representation of oversized and exaggerated features of a Chinese head, the evil and unwanted occupation of Australian land is signified. Five Greek God like white females representing the five colonial states of the time working together holding a stick as a lever wrenching the Chinese out of Australian soil and maintaining the purity of 'White Australia'. The position of the colonial Western woman was clear. She stood in between the others and at the core of European patriarchal ideology. Mike Crang has expressed it clearly:

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[7] Webb, J. and Enstice, A. *Aliens and Savages*, Harper Collins Publishers, Sydney, 1998, p 131.
[8] Ibid. p 132.
[9] Tseen L-K *Who are We Talking About? Asian-Australian Woman Writers...* Hecate, 1996. Vol. 22 Issue 3, p 11, 20 p.

The Western woman was a site of the contradictory relationships of gender and race. Her race was used to argue for superiority over the indigenous peoples, while her gender was more normally accorded a subordinate role. The terms used to make the colonised peoples sound subordinate were heavily gendered and normally used to justify and perpetuate the subordinate status of women.[10]

During the nineteenth-century, Opium and the Chinese were perceived as cognate. People who smoked Opium exposed themselves to a sense of no self-control and a reliance on substances. This was rather an unfair association in Modern Western society, because Opium had long being banned when the British East Indian Company introduced Opium forcefully to China. In a sense, I am presenting an antidote to this nineteenth-century misrepresentation of the Diasporic Chinese. The portrayal of the Chinese as intoxicated vermin and seducers of the European female had been evident in the cartoons that appeared in the nineteenth-century British papers.

The Chinaman has been associated with the lower classes in Western life. Interracial marriage was unthinkable at the time. Chinamen with European females had a colonial and Diasporic connotation. *The Chink and Child*[11], a novel that was later made into a film, is one of these kinds of fictional situations depicting the fateful association between a Chinese man and an European woman. Cheng Huan, is the central character in the story, he has been portrayed as a man who went to American with 'the dream of bringing a

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[10] Crang, M. *Cultural Geography*, Routledge, London, 1998,p 76.
[11] Burke, T. *The Chink and the Child*, in Limehouse Nights, New York, 1973, p 45.

message of Buddhist peace and love to the war-torn West.[12] However, he finds himself living in a condition of disappointment. He lives in a small room above a Chinese curio shop where he works. His social life is around opium addicts and Western prostitutes. The story reaches its climax when one day his next door neighbor Lucy (a European girl) has been beaten by her drunken father Battling Burrows. Cheng Huan takes her in when she is in danger of death. He gives her shelter and mutual support and later dresses her in ravishing traditional clothes form the Chinese curio shop. When Lucy's father discovers she is staying with a 'Chink' and dressing in 'ridiculous' clothes, he storms into Cheng Huan's place and tears the Chinese fabrics from Lucy, takes her home and beats her to death. When Cheng goes to Lucy's home and discovers her death he shoots Lucy's father and taks Lucy's body back to his room full of ravishing Chinese fabrics and ornaments. He respectfully lays her down and stabs himself to death by her side.

This fiction presents a critique of Western society at the time. Lucy's father is a representation of West's insensitivity and violence towards womanhood and otherness. Chinese and Western women are grouped together as victims of Western male dominance. Further, Lucy can be perceived as a naïve entity positioned in between the Eastern and Western culture as she is too young to know much of the West and has no knowledge of China. The ending is a wishful Western fantasy equal to the tragedy of 'Madam Butterfly'. The reason that the 'Chink' and Western women were grouped together has intriguing implications. They were both sub-classed to the Western male but in the

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[12] Spence, J. *The Chan's Great Continent*, Allen Lane The Penguin Press, London, 1990, p 167.

situation of Colonialism their position reinforced their subordinate status as Mike Crang has said:

> The Western woman was a site of the contradictory relationships of gender and race. Her race was used to argue for superiority over the indigenous peoples, while her gender was more normally accorded a subordinate role. The terms used to make the colonised people sound subordinate ere heavily gendered and normally used to justify and perpetuate the subordinate status of women.[13]

The Chinaman in the portrayal of the given story fits into the conventional notions of Orientalism at the time. Chen Hung was played by a Western actor in the film instead of a Chinese actor. Chinamen were grouped with the lower classes of Western society such as prostitutes and working class drunks in rough neighborhoods. Chinamen also lived in their own ghettos visited by European masters who fancied and consumed their exotic objects. It is clear that the film did indeed (intentionally or not) render the Chinese in European dislocation as a subject of manipulation and as a feminized being because, 'a patriarchal society is one in which masculinist values have become general values'[14]. All class categories that were not considered masculine were doomed to be dominated by means of cultural perception. John Beynon has argued extensively along these lines in his book *Masculinity and Culture*, following Western masculinity in various aspects of culture and history. In considering masculinity and Empire, he notes that British

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[13] Crang, M. *Cultural Geography*, Routledge, London, 1998,p 76.
[14] Marshment, M. 'Representation of Woman in Contemporary Popular Culture' in Richardson, D. (eds.) Thinking Feminist, The Guilford Press, New York, 1993, p 131.

masculinity was generally held to be superior to that of other 'races' and a civilizing force at the core of the Imperial mission. The subordinated native masculinity, on the other hand, was depicted as idle, lascivious and sexually decadent.[15] He went on to mention, that the 'cadets of Empire', (masculine British men) were trained to regard themselves as superior to domestic and colonized people. It was indeed the duty of those 'cadets' to civilize and bring order to wild and distant places abroad.[16]

These forms of perception have many contemporary equivalents, especially in heroic (action) Western movies in which the victim and villains are both depicted as Asians. The nineteenth-century sentiment of savagery did not vanish but came back in a more powerful form of media. Otherness being both evil and vulnerable was the common nineteenth-century connotation for the Europeans. They were evil because they were uncivilized by Western standards and they performed deeds unacceptable to the European code of morality. By the same token, they needed help from the Europeans so that they could be civilized.

There is an abundance of paintings in nineteenth-century Europe depicting and associating the East with Western woman. Their intent was clear: they wanted to perceive the East as a desirable exotic object but less than masculine. Ania Loomba described the feminization of the East as the gendered image of otherness and alien lands as entities available for plunder and possession, discovery and conquest.[17] Western

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[15] Beynon, J. *Masculinities and Culture*, Open University Press, Bukingham, 2002,p 29.
[16] Ibid. p 33.
[17] Loomba, A. *Colonialism/PostColonialism*, Routledge, London, 1998, p151.

woman was used as a representational object for indicating the inferior and submissive quality that Western politics wished to impose on otherness. At the time when feminism and gay rights were gradually gaining potency in patriarchal and heterosexual societies (around 1980s), this feminized otherness outrageously persisted in the gay community. There is a saying among gay people referring to an Asian gay man as a 'bulky Mary'. This literally denies an Asian masculinity in a community that was once heavily stigmatized and discriminated against[18]. Discrimination is not a monopoly for one particular society as long as there are othernesses amongst them.

The association between Chinese men and Western woman was not perceived as equal but rather in the terms of 'beauty and the beast'. This notion has contributed to the inspiration of *Soil*. It has long been established that non-European land is represented as female. Australia - whose name, like Europe, is a feminine Latin noun - was such a continent during British settlement. When the Chinese came, they became the beasts who had the tendency to sully the purity and whiteness of Western woman with their 'dirty yellow hands and savage looking faces'. The Chinese were not feminized but demonised. In 'Whit or Yellow'[19] as David Walker expressed in his book *Anxious Nation*, William Lane has stated the anxiety of the public discourse over the 'Chinese invasion'. One aspect of this rhetoric is consistent with the concept that underlines one of the connotations of *Soil*. It reads, 'The violation of young Australian womanhood by the Chinese allows white man at large to emerge as principal defenders of female honor.'[20] It

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[18] A conversation in ABC radio July 2002.
[19] 'Sketcher', *'White or Yellow'*, Boomerang, 18 February 1888.
[20] Walker, D. *Anxious Nation,* University of Queensland Press, Queensland , 1999,p 103.

was not only female honor that mattered but the fear of genetical mixture and adulterated whiteness that treatens white masculinity. This kind of perception was essential because they were dealing with people not an area of land. The coming of the Chinese was seen as an invasion. Chinese features were used as a distinctive difference and were exaggerated by the propagandists. What could be the most contrasting image to such 'savagery' of the Chinese? It was obviously the tenderness of the civilized Western female.

There was a contemporary rhetoric equivalent to the 'Chinese invasion' during the rise of the One Nation party in the mid 1990s. 'Australia is being swamped by Asians' was the main political campaign of the One Nation party. It again was based on the exaggeration of differences and a sense fear. Ghassan Hage has discerned this phenomenon as 'white decline'. He mentioned that White multiculturalism operates as a domesticated ethnicity around a primary white culture while retaining governmental position within the nation.[21] This governmental position is a shared identity with the majority of the European population regardless of their social class. In Hage's words it means a sense of governmental belongings.[22] Such a sense of dominance is enforced when one can be identified with the upper middle class and those in government positions. Hence the presence of Asians and their success has diversified the identity of t ; middle and middle upper class that was previously dominated by the Europeans decedents[23]. This induced anxiety on those who are unwilling to take subordinate position under Asians and believed that 'whiteness' should always have the dominant role. This aroused many

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[21] Hage, G. *White Nation*, Pluto Press, NSW, 1998, p 209.
[22] Ibid. p 46.
[23] Ibid. p 212

different forms of discontent and resentment. All in all, it manifested into a political force, not because Asian is evil, but different. It is the difference that threatened to adulterate a tender pure and feminized colonial whiteness.

The female body in Soil is an analogy of multiple positions including the sense of otherness and a self-asserted Western femininity. The female body is posing in a bending over position not accepted by common moral standards but conferring to the feminist strategy and the notion that women are treated as objects by most patriarchal societies. In this sculpture the female figure is not intended solely to represent Western woman or womanhood in general, else it would fall into feminist cliché. Rather, it signifies the visualization of the European colonies and colonized people. 'For the West, the other is embodied in the Orient; for man, the other is embodied in woman. For Western man, the images of woman and of non-Europeans are conflated.'[24] The small and insignificant Chinese pergola is a presence of Chinese migration in the West. A force not completely trivial but needing to be reckoned with when threatening to capture the pure feminized landscape and Western female.

Soil is a sculpture constructed to express the concept of passive settlement and being stood alongside (or below) the Western female as European others. Hence, the Chinese in the West is a manipulable subject that can be vermin and victim. Otherness and the Western woman have many intertwining properties. They are both under the oppression of a dominant Western male culture. It is applicable that sexism and racism have many similarities, because they are both hatched by a dominant mainstream. Such ideology

was created for them to suffer under the hegemony of Western masculinity with a justification. I am not saying the Chinese are equal to women in Western society. The parallel is only entertained in a conceptual sense because woman and 'others' in the West have long been perceived as objects of desire. The feminist theories have extensively covered this line of thought. As for the Western others, while their gender remains unchanged, their state of being is manipulated by media and the capital that spells power.

With all these connotations embedded in the work, I hope that the sculpture retains some ambiguity that expresses the paradoxes of the diasporic situation. The title *Soil* is perhaps ironic, suggesting that the female figure might be equated with dirt in ways more literal than the illustrious ancient personifications would have it.

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[24] Kennedy V. *Edward Said*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2000, p 41.

Ruin

28.
Ruin
Fiberglass and timber
145x 124 x 136 cm
2001

This work consists of two major conceptual components, which are a plinth made out of an Asiatic face and an architectural ruin. The motif of the ruin refers to Graeco-Roman architecture and its descending historical variants. It is not my intention to contribute to the history of architecture or to discuss its aesthetics with any pretension to summing up the literature in the field. It is however, a vehicle for a Diasporic conception in its properties reminiscent of a colonial past.

Ruins have many properties for contemplation, because they stand for a presence of non-existence. They have long conveyed a sense of loss and wonderment of what was. Nostalgic sentiments are elicited whether it was a palace, temple or just a house. One

can easily imagine the sound of human occupation and the tragedy of the how the building came to be a ruin. What the ruin was is of secondary importance as far as art is concerned. It is a space for imaginary cognition that attracts wistful attention. Christopher Woodward in his book *In Ruins* states:

> When we contemplate ruins, we contemplate our own future. To statesmen, ruins predict the fall of Empires and to philosophers the futility of mortal man's aspirations. To a poet, the decay of a monument represents the dissolution of the individual ego in the flow of time; to a painter or architect, the fragments of a stupendous antiquity call into question the purpose in their art.[1]

When one looks upon this sculpture, the first question might be: whose ruin? First, one must discern the colonial property of Greek and Roman architecture. Ancient Greece has been regarded as the founder of Western civilization and philosophy. Its demise ironically led to the evolution of the Western worlds. The glorious Greco-Roman empires have long gone. What are left are those ruins of once monumental shrines and decorative elements of neo-classical buildings. The irony has been the inheritance of the fragmentation of Greek architecture - somehow with augmented prestige, as in the paintings of Poussin - which was spread by European imperial powers.

Chris Abel has made a study on Malaysian colonial architecture in terms of cultural transformation and the influence of colonial rule. He said:

> The story of the classical language as it has evolved since its origins in Greece and

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[1] Woodward, C. *In Ruins*, Chatto & Windus, London, 2001, pp 2-3.

Rome are that of architecture which has traveled not only across the boundaries regional boundaries and the boundaries of time, but also across the social form and function. The builders of the temples of ancient Greece could hardly have anticipated Rome's use of the orders on the multi-story Colosseum. The displacement of the orders from temple to arena thus signaled the arrival of a major architectural language, which, with appropriate invention and sensibility, might be drawn upon for virtually any social function.[2]

Buildings that comprise classical elements also remind me of the age of the 'enlightenment' that occurred not only in Europe but in many non-European lands discovered by the European explorers and later colonized. These two significant and coincidental events in Europe have had a great impact on world order today. That makes it an intriguing point in the discourse of Orientalism and Chinese Diaspora.

The central business district of Melbourne is mostly made up from modern, Gothic and classical building. The classical buildings maintain a strong tie with Europe. It is parallel to the make up of the dominant Euro-centric Australian population. This popularity of Italian classicism can be attributed to England at the time and direct parallels with the Italian climate. Houses, offices, bank, clubs, public buildings and even churches were designed as skilful reinterpretations of temples, palazzi and villas.[3]

Due to European colonization, Greek architectural elements were scattered around the world. In the case of Melbourne, classical buildings were erected by people of British

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[2] Abel, C. *Architecture and Identity*, Architectural Press, Oxford, 1997, p 160.
[3] Trethowan, B. *'The Victorian City'* from Goad, P (ed.) Melbourne Architecture, The Wastermark Press, Sydney, 1999, p 25.

origins. These buildings bearing fragments of classical ornaments appeared as a broadly flamboyant and fashionable international movement (eclecticism) around Europe and its colonies. Demetri Porphyrios says:

> If we choose to embrace the tradition of the classical we will find no recipes but we will encounter again and again a kind of genius for practical life, a kind of genius that is actually less of a gift than a constant task of adjustment to present contingencies. It is in this sense that we can speak of the classical as that which endures; but this defiance of time is always experienced as a sort of historical present.[4]

Nonetheless, in a postcolonial setting, the re-occurrence of Greek elements in architecture in the world outside Europe has a tendency to exceed its stylistic and innocent connotations and bear the deeds of their builders that have been left behind. There is an abundance of such evidence in Victoria and New South Wales such as the state parliament house of Victoria, the Gallery of NSW and a civil building in Bendigo (see page75). These were the buildings constructed as the extension of the British colonial empire.

The Greek temple did not begin essentially as a place for the practice of religion but focused on sacrifices dedicated to their Gods.[5] It was a practice that according to contemporary values was savage, and uncivilized. It is however shared by most of the human cultures in their early stages of development. It was a worship of gods with

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[4] Porphyrios, D. *'The relevance of classical architecture'* in Papadkis, A & Watson, H New Classicism Rizzoi, New York, 1990, p 67.
[5] Tomlinson, R. A. *Greek and Roman Architecture*, British Press, London, 1995, p 21.

29.
State Parliement of Victoria
Photo taken in 2000

30.
Art Gallery of New South Wales
Photo take in 2001

31.
Bendigo's Performing Arts Centre
Photo taken in 2002

human desires and weaknesses, even if sublime aloofness. Therefore, the Greek temple was perhaps a reflection of humanity through the construct of Greek mythical Gods; though the Greek gods were not mythical to the early to classical Greeks. To some extent, ruins signify the same domesticizing of Greek culture that occurred with Greek religion. The stories retailed through mythographers do not have the sublime awe and religious dread that they had for Sophocles or Aeschylus.

The spread of classical elements around the world by imperial powers was justified through the charter to civilize the third world. Ironically, however, these festive buildings with such elements are either becoming ruined or continue to house postcolonial governance. Their existence is no longer a stylish representation of classical ideals but a connotation of the dark side of political desire that persists in various regimes.

Paradoxically, there are also several neo-classical buildings in Taipei the capital city of Taiwan, where there was no record of European colonization (except Portugal that occupied small portions of the island for only 15 years during the Sixteenth century). However, there was a secondhand European colonization practiced by the Japanese. Hence classical buildings were erected in Taiwan by Asians during the Japanese colonial rule (1895-1945).

These Japanese-erected buildings have been constructed with an evident common grammar of pan-Westernisation. This fascination with the Western architecture and the Western culture by the Japanese was the result of Japan's effort to catch up with the West's advanced technology. The architects who designed these colonial buildings

were influenced by the neo-Renaissance or the neo-mannerist style.[6] The prime example was the colonial government palace, which is currently used as a residence of Taiwan's presidential office (see page 78). It was not a pure revival of classical architecture, but a Japanese alteration of Germansque [7] building with Greek architectural elements.

There are other buildings with a more 'complete represen...ion of the Greek temple façade. The Land Bank of Taiwan, National Natural Museum and colonial buildings in the University of Tainan, (see next page) were constructed with traces of Renaissance elements and Greek columns. The intention of constructing these kinds of buildings that represent power was to demonstrate the imperial presence of Japan and to assist in carrying out their governance. Hence, the innocence of architecture is lost by the colour of the hand and the motive to build them. To erect architecture out of its social, cultural and geographical context requires and demonstrates the apparently inherent power of the motifs, a power that is economical, political and militaristic. There are recent examples like the construction of the Melbourne central complex by the Daimaru corporation during the early 1990s. This business complex can be seen as a add-on cultural imprint by the Japanese in Melbourne cityscape.

After the defeat of Japanese and their "Axis Allies"[8], Taiwan was in a state of Chinese renaissance. Several examples of traditional architecture (see also page 78) were built in an answer to the presence of colonial buildings. The aim of this revival was to wipe out Japanese colonial influence and to bring back Chinese nationalism.
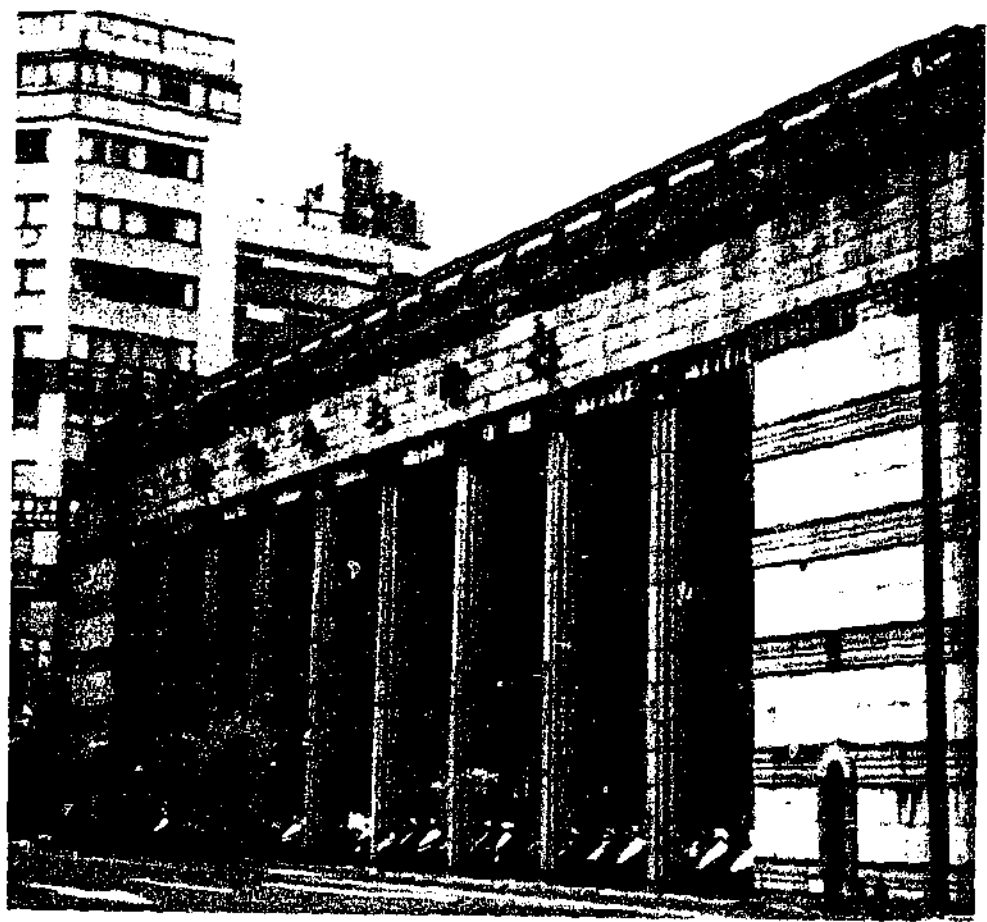
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[6] Wang, L-F. *Taipei Architecture*, Taipei architects Association, Taipei, 1985, p 27.
[7] Ibid. p 81.
[8] This was the name of the alliance of Nazi Germany, Mussolili's Italy and imperial Japan during WWII.
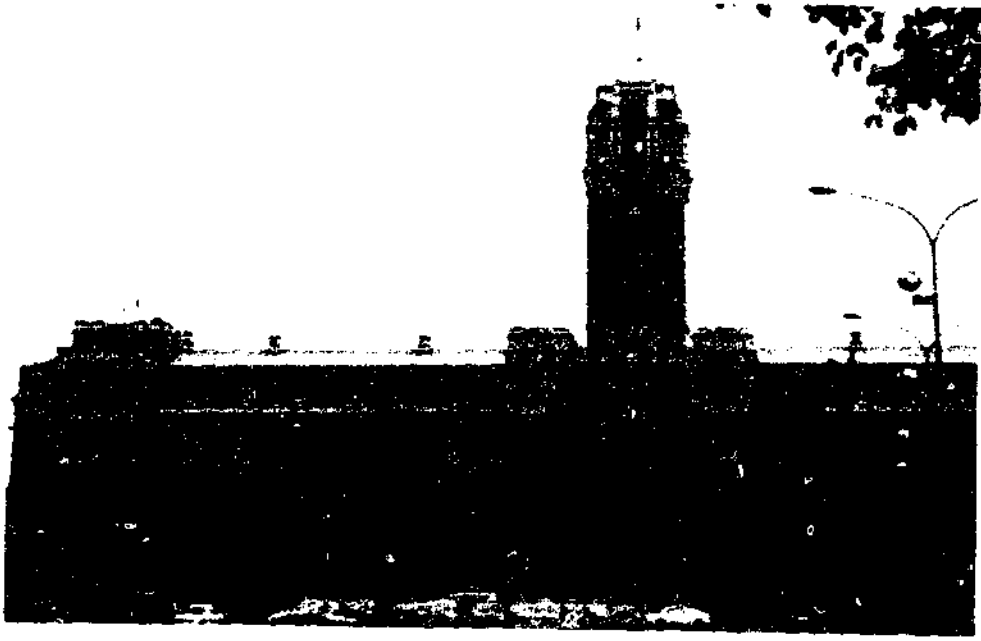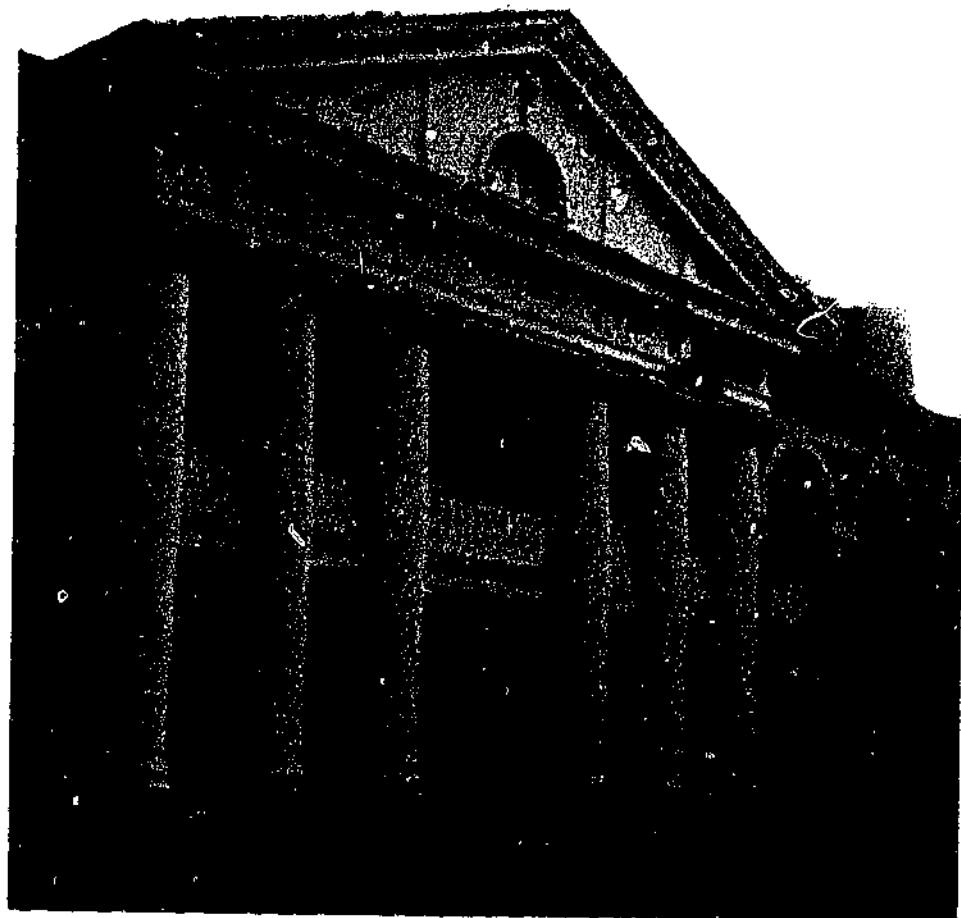
32.
Presidential Palace in Taipei
Photo taken in 2000

33.
Land Bank in Taipei
Photo taken in 2000

34.
National Natural Museum in Taipei
Photo taken in 2000

35.
A colonial building in the
University of Tainan
Photo taken in 2003

36.
National Concert Hall
Photo taken in 2000

Architecture is a historical landmark that has manifested in itself as a reflection of the political and cultural trends of the time. The legacy of Ancient Greece has been preserved and spread by the continued propagation of Western civilization, even by Asian powers. Chinese culture has been carried on in the same sense but in different ways. Chinatown is one passive example of the reciprocal spread of culture and buildings that was not arrived at by the force of conquest but of migration and integration. The presence in Chinatown is minimal when compared to Chinese cities abroad.

The ruin is a signifier of a historical past that stirs our imagination in melancholy, untraceable ways. Without seeking archeological truth, ruins can lead to a flow of an impulsive imagination. The irony of ruins in the case of the Greeks was that their architectural and political achievements were assimilated by the Romans, later to become the symbol of Western governmental power, and also to become ruins, to be thoroughly fragile, to be rescued and put on display in the British museum, where they once again become somehow symbolically robust. The implication of all classical building across the globe as ruins was formative during the initial stage of the conception of the sculpture *Ruin*. Classical elements remind me of the ruins of the Greeks which parallel how these elements relive their lives as ornamental fragments within neo-classical architecture. As Abel has mentioned,

> Classical architecture is, however, not the only exact form of architecture which exhibits the complex properties of a distinct form of life, and it is only that peculiar blinkered vision due to Western cultural hegemony which encourages us to ignore the lessons of parallel developments in non-Western cultures. It is, for example, no

coincidence that, when scholars of non-Western architecture remark upon the lack of any obvious direct relations between form and function, they are referring to a well-traveled architecture that, like the classical style, has evolved out of much the same process of global exportation by conquest and cultural dominance, whereby the immense variety of non-Western forms developed out of a repeated crossing of both regional and functional boundaries.[9]

The notion of ruin need not be applied to structural disintegration. What I wish to imply through this sculptural object is a sense of historical memory and imagination. When I view classical ornaments that are utilized in other forms of architecture, I see ruins of ancient Greece and how these 'elements' were spread. There is no suggestion that any building bearing these elements constitutes ruins. Ruins, on the other hand, are related to the landscape as an 'imprint'[10] of culture. In Chris Healy's words, 'a gesture towards learning to inhabit landscapes of memory which are, in part, landscapes littered with ruins; some archaic and others nightmarish, some quaint simulations and others desperate echoes.'[11] The Asiatic face in this sculpture might suggest that it is a part of a landscape protruding or mounting on the earth, reminiscent of the history of Chinese existence in the West. The facial expression also connotes thinking in-progress. This face is typically Asian as it does not have a high nose bridge and the far end of the eye is tilting upward. The shape of eye does remind me the sound of 'ching chung' and a gesture of a white person using its finger to imitating an Asiatic face. Hence, the face in this sculpture indicates the identification of otherness.

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[9] Abel, C. *Architecture and Identity*, Architectural Press, Oxford, 1997,p 160.
[10] The notion of human landscape as cultural imprint will be fully expressed and referenced in chapter entitled 'Imprint'.
[11] Healy, C. *From the Ruins of Colonialism*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1997. P 3.

The Asiatic face does not only literarily mean a presence of overseas Chineseness but it is a way of stating a sense of memory associated with human territorial division. An Asiatic face is like an emblem of a race and culture that through a thousand years will still remain a difference in Chinese-Western Diaspora. Its features resemble the masks of historical Chinese opera characters, and the way that the West perceives them. Chinese Diaspora exists in the memory of China and its Western present.
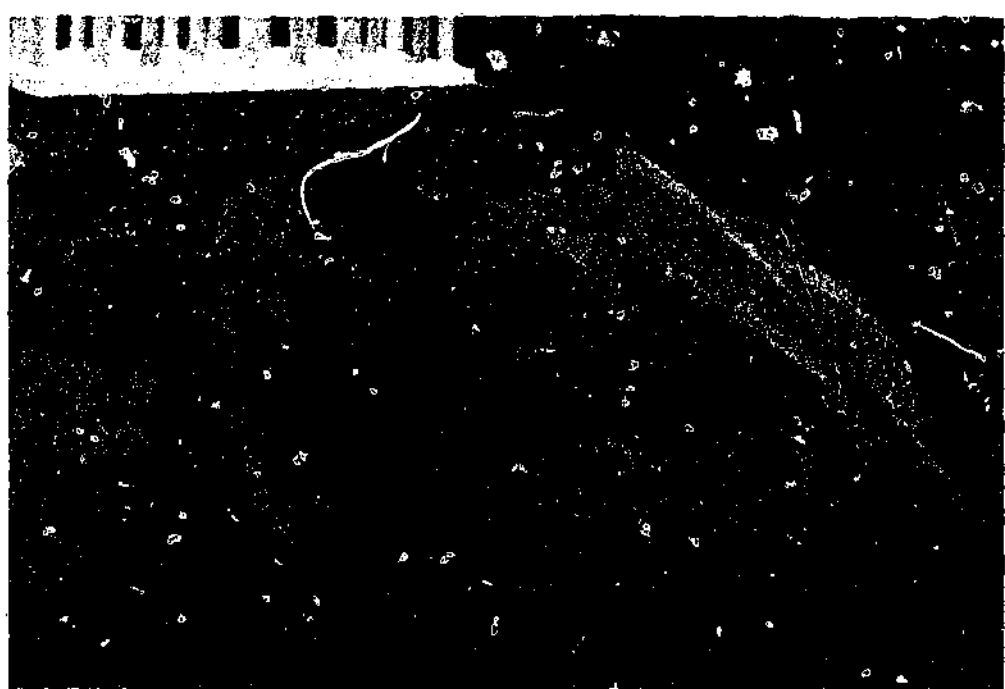
37.
Close up of sculpture *Ruin.*

Within the frame of mind during and after the construction of this sculpture, its prominence in terms of interpretation comes after a long period of contemplation. It is an educated memory of Chinese history. If the claim of classical elements as ornamental fragments is included as a full projection of this sculpture, then the memory of a Chinese historical past should be its underling agenda hidden inside my consciousness, only discovered by stumbling upon a reconstruction of the *Uan Min Uan* (see page 81). The reconstruction was situated in the garden of Sun Yea Shan's memorial in Taipei as a sign of the Uan Min Uan exhibition from China in 2001. The replica of a small part of the Uan Min Uan ruin was made of polyethylene in true scale. Standing beside it allowed me to make a connection with the sculpture I made.

Uan Min Uan is a story that was imprinted in the minds of my generation through the teaching of Chinese history. It was situated in the West of Beijing because the site has

38.
Reproduction of *Uan Min Uan*
Made in polyethylene
Photo taken in Taipei 2002.
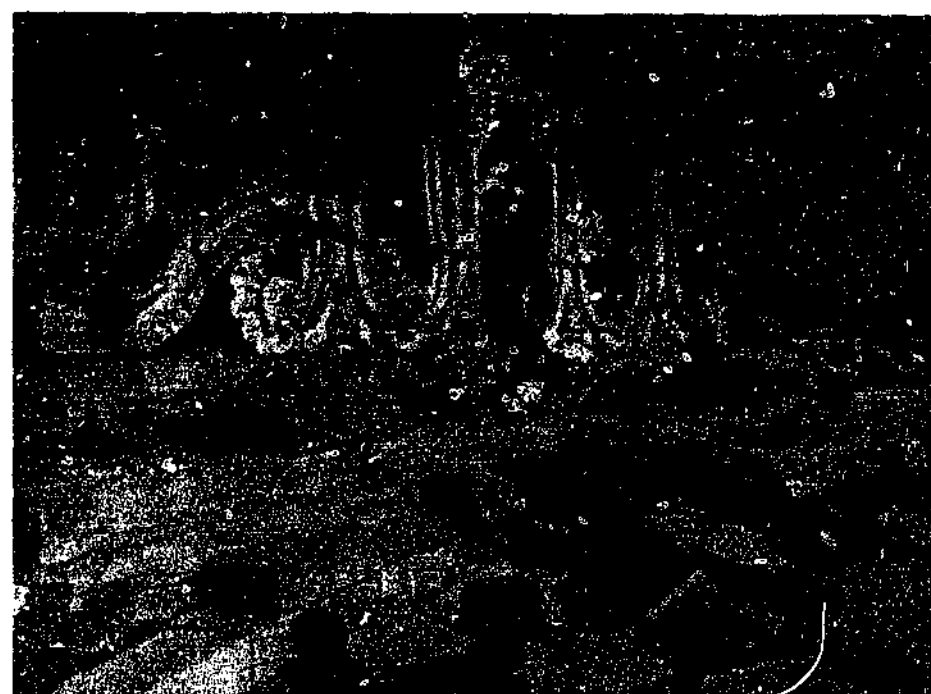
39.
Uan Min Uan at present
The side view of Western House,
section of *Ta Sue Far*.
Souce: Wong, W. *Uan Min Uan*, Su
Sang Publishing, Taipei, 1992, p 43.

much pictorial natural scenery where many emperors (1012-1820 BC.) built their summer palaces before the Ching Dynasty. Because of the Dynastic change and war that accompanied it, summer palaces were built and rebuilt many times. Uan Min Uan was first built by the Ka Shih emperor after the Ching dynasty had secured China as a Manchu Empire; later successors of the dynasty refurbished it periodically.[12] Uan Min Uan represents a time of glory, interaction, wealth and sadness. To construct it requires colossal amounts of wealth and manpower. Only a prosperous Empire can rise to such scale.

Uan Min Uan occupies 15000 square meters of land. It has 40 sections that include highly prized and admired scenery in China. However there is one particular section

that stands out from the rest. It is the 'Chi Young Lo' (meaning Western house), which was designed and built by three major Jesuits from Europe: they are J. Castiglione (from Italy) P. Michel Benoit (from France) and Jenn Denis Attiret (also from France). These three Jesuits did not just build the Chi Young Lo, they also served as windows to the Western civilization at the time. They built this 'European theme park' based on Baroque and adapted to Chinese styles. Chi Young Lo was built during the eighteenth century when Europe and China had an active exchange in many forms. Many craftsmen who built the Chi Young Lo had demonstrated a good understanding of Eur ean architecture.[13] It was Chinese Occidentalism practiced on a monstrous scale. 'The summer capital can be read as a composite landscape that reproduced the map of the Manchu Empire where the order imposed within the garden, mirrored the larger order imposed on the conquered territories.'[14]

Chi Young Lo as part of the *Uan Min Uan*, was built as a curiosity over the Chinese 'other' that can be seen as a kind of exoticism. Chi Yang Lou was a rather dwarfed European cultural landscape that not only indulged a Chinese fascination but also signified a sense of ownership and a material conquest. *Uan Min Uan* was first built in 1709 and destroyed by European forces in 1860. *Uan Min Uan* lasted one hundred fifty one years. Its worth is beyond calculation because each year its maintenance alone costs one hundred thousand "Lang"[15]. One hundred and fifty one years of existence before its destruction adds up to one hundred and eighty-million Lang. This excludes the treasures that were acquired during this time that were once displayed and housed in

[12] Wong, W. *Uan Min Uan*, Su Sang Publshing, Taipei, 1992, pp 1-8.
[13] Ibid. pp 8-10.
[14] Crang, M. *Cultural Geography*, Routledge, London, 1998, p 37.
[15] Lang is the major currency of the Ching dyansty.

the Uan Min Uan.[16]

The fate of Uan Min Uan was bonded with the fate of the Ching dynasty. Its rise and demise mirrors how the dynasty ended. Its ruin foretells the coming destruction of the Chinese pride and the suffering of the Chinese people. Because the one who built it and owned it lost the power to preserve its treasure, a symbol of power that it once possessed.

The destruction of the Uan Min Uan was after the second Opium War (1860) where China was defeated by Anglo-Franco allied forces. There were many unequal treaties signed between China and European powers after the cease-fire. However European powers still wanted to provoke more conflict with China to allow them the rightful place for more military assaults and consequently gain control of China. Surprisingly this provocation ended in the defeat of Anglo-Franco forces in the battle of Ta-Goo coast. The Ching court thus became self-inflamed and announced that the treaty once signed was no longer valid. This gesture further angered the Anglo-Franco government, Twenty thousand strong reinforcements were sent from England and France. This battle was decisive, the Chinese army was not much of an adversary for the allied forces. Beijing and *Uan Min Uan* were captured. *Uan Min Uan* was thus vandalized and looted by the Anglo-French soldiers.

After the looting of *Uan Min Uan* the British diplomat Lord Elgin announced, that the only way to make the Chinese abide by the rules of international treaties was to burn down what they felt proud of and held precious. Their actions were not to loot or to

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[16] Wong, W. *Uan Min Uan*, Su Sang Publishing, Taipei, 1992, pp 8-11.

destroy but to punish the Chinese. The General of the French army de Montauban, concurred and further said that the destruction of *Uan Min Uan* was necessary to bring the Chinese Ching court to justice. As for the question of an action against humanity it was well justified.[17]

With the support of the British government and rhetoric from home, the British army decided to burn *Uan Min Uan* in the morning of the eighteenth of October 1860. What the British had burned was not just the world's most luxurious garden palace but a part of human civilization. Within *Uan Min Uan* there were artifacts that were in many ways equal to the arts of European Renaissance masterpieces as well as a large collection of historically valuable literature from previous dynasties.[18]

The destruction of the *Uan Min Uan* did not end there. The Ching court had clearly shown its incompetence and led the Chinese nation to more defeats when facing the challenge of European powers. In August 1900, the eight nation[19] allied forces gathered again to tyrannize the earth of China. They defeated the uprising of the Boxer rebellion when marching towards Beijing. The army of the Ching court was no match for the allied forces both in weaponry and morale. The Ching army was defeated and became a fragmented mob, looting their own cities. This time the further demise of the Uan Min Uan was not from the Europeans but from its own people. [20] The end of Uan Min Uan perhaps signified the beginning of an end to the dynastic continuum and its history. As Hegel stated, "the history of China and Oriental states is for the most part really

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[17] Wong, W. *Uan Min Uan*, Sue Sang Publishing, Taipei, 1992, p 41.
[18] Ibid. p 41.
[19] America, France, English, Germany, Austria, Italy, Portugal and Spain
[20] Wong, W. *Uan Min Uan* Sue Sang Publishing, Taipei, 1992, pp 59-60.

unhistorical. For it is only the repetition of the same majestic ruin"[21] Through Hegel's analogy I see the ruin of Classical Greece as an abrupt change and progress in European history. Each passing episode in European history did bring destruction but also triggered innovation in science, social and cultural change. Whereas China has been in a state of historical non-history until the West stopped this cycle by force. Ancient Greek architectural elements represents such force spreading around the world by colonial occupation. From this line of thought I also see elements of Chinese culture being decayed and dislocated by this very force that shaped the modern world. Yes, China is old and as Hegel had said Chinese history is a non-history; so, let such history be its own ruin and embedded in the minds of Chinese.

Greece and Rome might be a thing of history but the ruins of their temples and shrines continue to stand in all their paradoxes. Ruins have given us an imaginary stimulus perhaps as a result of their timelessness. Time has given once a dazzling temple a new poetic life and aesthetic projection. Ruins symbolize the decadence of culture. In the case of *Ruin*, it does not mean the decay of Greek nor Chinese culture. But it might register as a symbol of the universal practice of imperial conquest. *Ruin* has perhaps three major meanings. One, acknowledges the lurid "pleasure"[22] of the conquest over an enemy's territory. Celebrations of victory and the pleasure of being surrounding by the ruins of the enemy's stronghold or their once proud existence. Second, is the nostalgic sense, because it reminds us of what was once a lively culture and society now reduced to fragments of memory. Finally *Ruin* might act as a political historical memory, scarring the landscape with each civilizational passing.

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[21] McInnes, N. *Orientalism, the Evolution of a Concept*, National Interest, Winter 98/99 Issue 54, p 73, 9 p.
[22] Macaulay, R. *Pleasure of Ruins*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1965, p 24.

Part Two

The Temple

Bookshelf
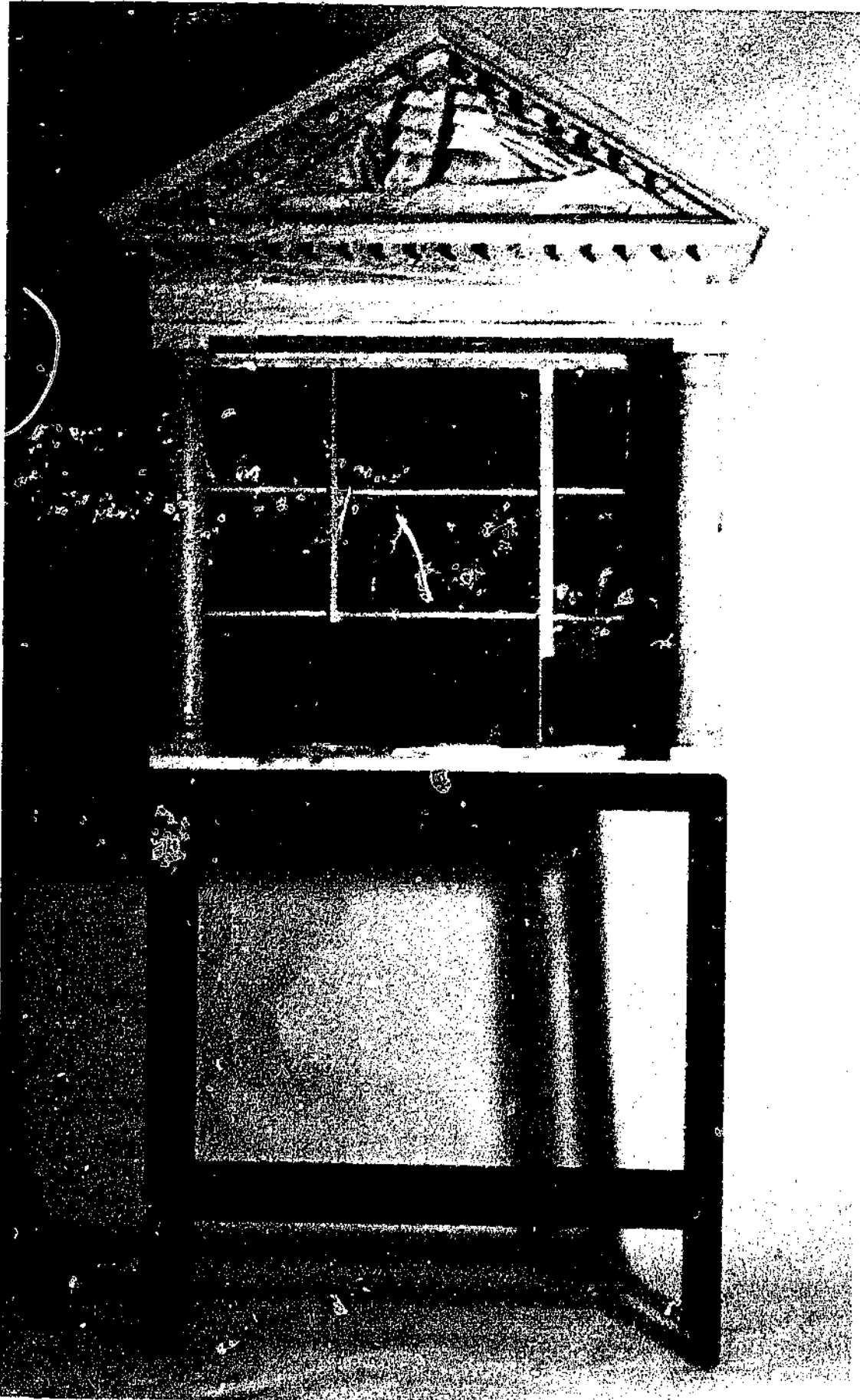
40.
Bookshelf
Fiberglass and Assorted timber
234 x 63 x 39 cm
2003

On the margin of European culture, and alienated from his own, the 'coloured' intellectual is an artifact of colonial history, marginal man *par excellence*. He is a creature of two worlds, and of none. Thrown up by a specific history, he remains stranded on its shores even as it recedes: and what he comes into is not so much a twilight world, as a world of false shadows and false light.[1]

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[1] Sivanandan, A. '*Alien Gods*' in Parekh, B. (ed.) *Colour, Culture and consciousness*, George Allen and Unwin, Edinburgh, 1974, p. 104.

Colonialism and knowledge are areas that disturb the contemporary discourse of ethnographic representation. It is an invisible frame (or a hegemony) overpowering efforts of 'third world' intellectuals in breaking such 'embankment'. I am troubled by the argument of otherness and its implications that led me to visit and to re-visit 'our' colonial history. Colonialism sets up the world to operate the way it is today and fills the museums of the Western world with ethnographic artifacts. Martin Prosler has put it:

> The world-wide diffusion of museums was tied in with European colonialism and imperialism. Their expansion, then, occurred in close connection with those political factors in globalization, which have provided the contemporary world order with its basic structure.[2]

It had also constructed the knowledge of the world, and claimed its mighty authority. This authority is not easily challenged, because the challenger of non-European intellectuals faces the charge of prejudice.

The work *Bookshelf* deals with knowledge and representation. The *Bookshelf*, as the title suggests, implies a kind of public education as 'one of the keys to the process of colonial domination. In education lay the means for introducing the dominant imperial culture-elite, Western standards of aesthetics and cultural values and the stratification of

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[2] Prosler, M. '*Museums and Globalization*', in Macdonald, S. (eds.) *Theorising Museums*, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 1996, p 22.

subordinate cultures within the colonized country.'[3] I have continued to use the ancient Greek temple façade to signify the foundation of the West and as images of museums worldwide. The work can be easily interpreted by reading the painting and relief sculpture mounted in the pediment - a painting of a fleet of sailing ships. It is a signifier of the age of sail in which Europeans had extended their influence over most of the inhabitable world. The knowledge of the world was thus acquired and translated into the cultural structure of Western civilization.

The use of the Greek temple in this research is intended to function as a representation of the continuum of Western civilization. It is based on the phenomena of European expansion. The Greek temple façade was spread to the non-European world by means of European occupation. In spite of its unquestionable beauty and the high ideals that it embodies, the Greek temple also bears a stigma that exceeds its original purpose as a place for the worship of divinities. In the eyes of some 'colonized' descendents, it is a reminder of the suffering and the shame of their colonial past.

The approaching fleet

Ships are an image of cultural and historical importance to human civilization and more specifically for post-colonial cultures. The ship is a vessel that mobilized human convention across treacherous seas and spread it to new soils. Thus, the stories of cross-continental conflict begin.

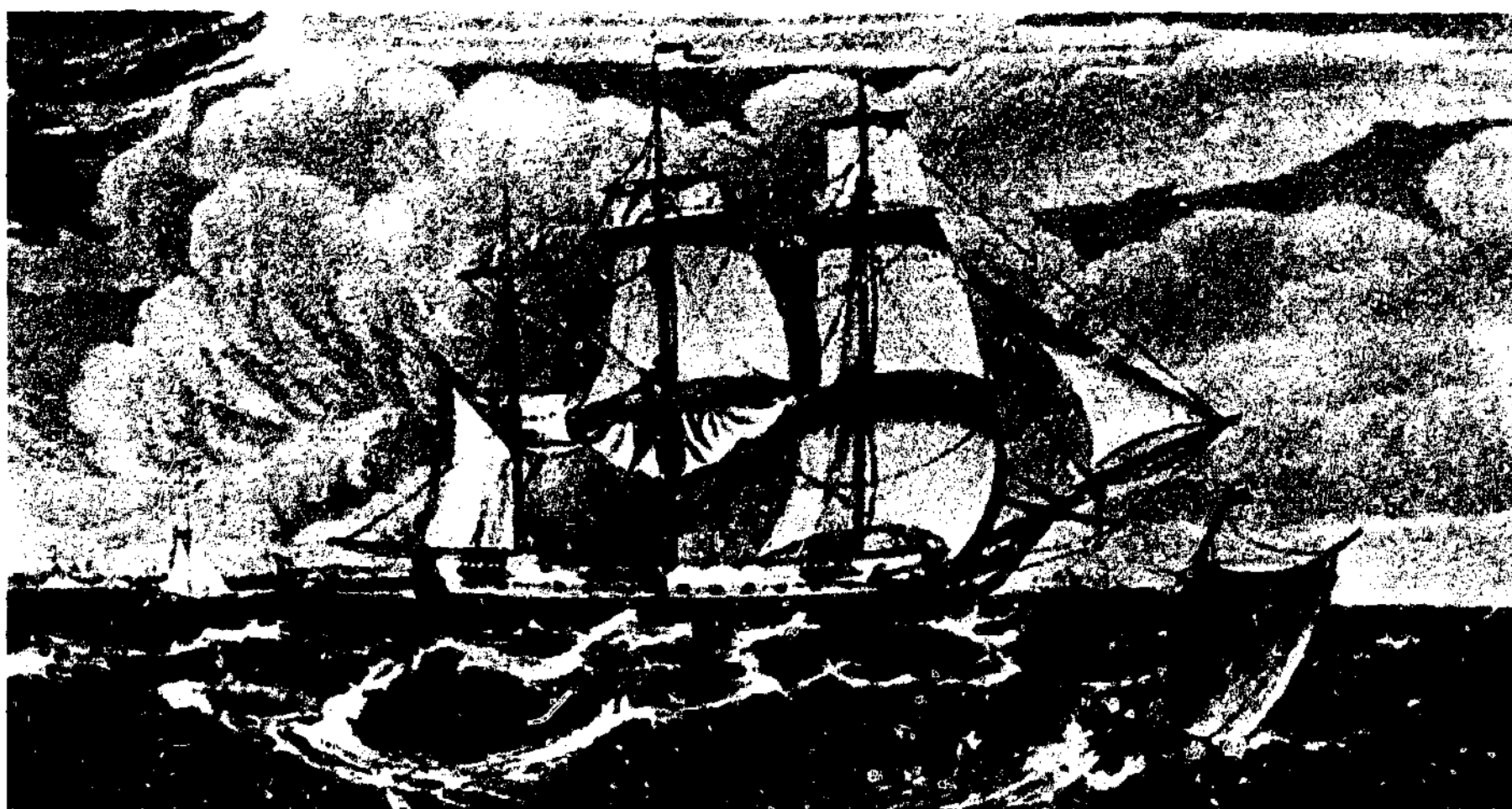[3] Billington, R. *Culture and Society*, Macmillan, London, 1991, p 65.
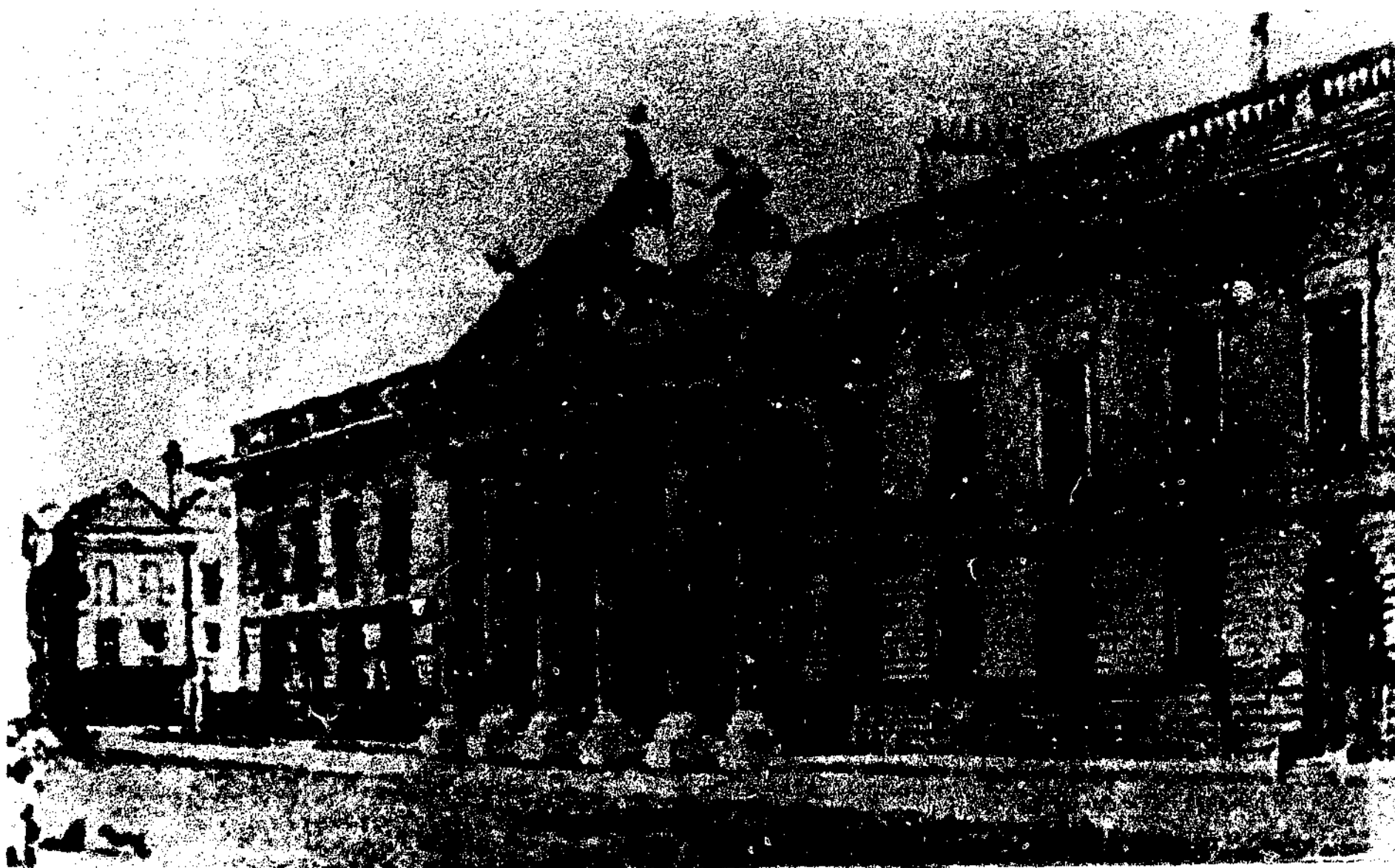
41.
East Indian Company
From Chinese History Museum Visual Reference of the Chinese Contemporary History,
Shang Hai Education Publishing, First volume, 1983, p 20.

43.
East Indian Company's Opium transport
From Chinese History Museum Visual Reference of the Chinese
Contemporary History, Shang Hai Education Publishing, First
volume, 1983, p 22.

Viewing the approaching ships on the distant horizon from the shore aroused peoples' imaginations. It could be Gods approaching, a convoy of exotic goods, long an ...pated loved ones returning from a journey, an enemy fleet in formation preparing for a coastal attack or a ship loaded with 'illegal' immigrants escaping human disaster and hoping for salvation and human sympathy.

The image of a fleet might also correlate with the history of Australia where the image suggests successive waves of immigration and a continuing supply of social dislocation. It in some sense represents the unwanted arrivals during the first phase of the Australian nation's development, such as the Chinese arrivals during the nineteenth century. Therefore, a fleet of boats can signify resentment when its cargo carries subjects that have the potential to unsettle the imagined purity of the dominant culture of the nation.

The ship is a vessel not confined to exploration and trade across oceans but a symbol of voyage and carriage. In a migrant society such as Australia, the ship reminds people that their existence is not legitimately Aboriginal but a link from somewhere else. Ships can also be perceived as vessels that transported exoticness from the colonies to European centers where the knowledge of the colonized were catalogued and transformed into the structure of 'Western' knowledge. One example concerning colonial Australia was that its flora and fauna specimens were exported to major museums and wealthy private

collectors in Britain and Europe often with the assistance of the colonial authorities.[4] Sometimes the substance of this biological interest included the remains of human specimens.

A sailing ship is also an image of the colonial trauma associated with battles at sea, European conquest and refugees. China was once shamed by the Europeans because its weakness was exposed and its geographic integrity challenged. In this postcolonial world, I believe the Chinese people have inherited a historical scar that always reminds them of nineteenth-century China.

The ship has a connotation that is due to the fabrication of cultural production in the study of colonial history. A Chinese person who knows his or her history well, will concur that the Chinese are not a sea-faring culture. Historical records on sea travel are scarce, with only one significant event. Zan Ho was the only historical figure associated with a voyage to the South China Sea. He traveled from Fujien (a state in southern China) only as far as today's Indonesia. It is modest compared to the distance between China and England. In this case, the image of the sailing ship is more or less associated with European colonial conquest in the position of Chinese Diaspora.

During the late nineteenth century, China had been defeated by European powers many times in wars over territorial and trade disputes. Most decisive battles were fought at sea. The sovereignty of the state was under a great challenge. Hence, the intellectual class of

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[4] Anderson, M. & Reeves, A. 'Contested Identities: Museums and the Nation in Australia' in Flora, E. S. (ed.) *Museums and the Making of "ourselves"*, Leicester University Press, London, p 83.

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the time who had proposed 'self-strengthening', and who advocated the removal of China's weakness by learning from the barbarians, were violently opposed by the vast majority of scholars and officials[5].

The very first all out war with Europeans was fought over the importation of opium by the British East Indian Company. This lethal substance was transported by sea, which reaffirms this colonial stigma with European nautical vessels. Large numbers of the Chinese population were addicted to opium which resulted in the weakening of the body and the soul. Chinese officials had noticed its effect and in an attempt to stop it, tried to destroy the British stock. However, without the back up of an able government and a modern fleet, this 'unwise' gesture to save the Chinese people from further demoralization had incurred a heavy price. The confrontation exposed China's weakness that signaled the Europeans to further exploit China.

The Chinese ego was shattered by the cannon balls of the West. Those with vision know the 'edge' of Western civilization was not the cannon ball itself but its social structure, education system and culture, suggesting a fateful link between canon and cannon. Hence, the hybridization of the Chinese/Western cannon is not a contemporary discourse but originated in the era of colonialism. I have discussed these colonial incursions in China because of their validity concerning the discourse of Chinese Diaspora. However, in the situation of Diaspora, the events of the past have collided with the cultural perceptions of today.

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[5] Franke, W. *China and the West*, Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1967, p 103.

Knowledge

The age of sail was also the age of enlightenment that needs to be considered in terms of colonial discourse. The funding of museums and the classification of knowledge and the human race were all done in the name of science. Anthropology in particular is the one that has the longest lasting effect among other alignments of colonialism. Therefore, a painting of a nineteenth-century European fleet can be attached to the acquisition of the knowledge of others. In acquiring knowledge, there has been a priority of what comes first to be assimilated into the identity of Western civilization. Wolfgan Franke has pointed out that:

Oriental civilizations were studied in the first instance purely on the basis of their importance for the civilizations of the West, and especially for the Greco-Roman. Thus, the Near East and Egypt were included from an early period, owing to their links with the Greek world. In the same way, a place was found for the study of India by way of Indo-European philology. For Sanscrit, the classical literary language of India is in fact an Indo-European language[6].

Knowledge of the Orient had been considered secondary in Eurocentric institutions, because it had little association with the way the West 'wanted' to identify itself. The inclusion of the study of the Orient and other non-European cultures perhaps served as a

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[6] Franke, W. *China and the West*, Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1967, p 145.

function to distinguish and to solidify Western identity. 'To examine the boundaries of difference is to acknowledge the relations of difference as the relations of power.'[7]

The colonial knowledge of otherness was troublesome due to the lack of objectivity and proper method of observation. For instance, 'every manifestation of Chinese civilization was measured and judged by standards drawn exclusively from Western developments but assumed to be absolute'[8]. This attitude has been carried on even to the present day. However, while contemporary method in the study of otherness has improved, the measurement is somewhat unchanged in principle. It is not to say that all else but the West is evil. This comparative measurement is employed by most cultures when it comes to the understanding of the other. We rely on the knowledge of ourselves. This critique of the knowledge of otherness is like two sides of a coin that criticism of one cannot be made without the other[9].

Colonial conquest has proven to be a brief moment in human history. However vast the territories that have been occupied by the European empires--not counting the countries speaking European languages, especially English, Spanish and Portuguese in North and South America and Australasia--they have now retreated to their lands of origin and their influence has been greatly reduced. This can be measured in the volume of capital and industrial resources, which are exceedingly impressive in economies such as the Japanese. However, long-lasting effects were not only caused by force but by the knowledge

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[7] Naficy, H. (eds.) *Otherness and the media Harwood Academic Publishers*, Singapore, 1993. p x.
[8] Franke, W. *China and the West*, Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1967. p 146.
[9] Chow, R. *Writing Diaspora*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1993, p 6.

produced by colonial scholars. A classification of superiority (according to a vision of progress integral to modernity) had been programmed into human consciousness, which much of Asia now happily illustrates and bears out.

Museum

The museum is a product of the West, which originated at the time of the Renaissance. It was the result of the enthusiasm of princes, nobles and scholars for collecting relics of the past as well as natural history specimens, and items illustrating the development of science.[10] Today, the museum has been associated with colonialism and the role it has played in the storage of colonial collections and ethnographic representation. The museum is also an authority that imposes meaning upon its collections. "Authenticity is not about factuality or reality. It is about authority. Objects have no authority; people do."[11] Deborah Root in the preface of her book *Cannibal Culture* describes how the world has come to be imagined as a vast warehouse of images. Other cultures became fragments of a world destroyed in the process of colonization. Such cultural fragments have been aestheticized and consumed in the West due to their distinctiveness and a sense of authenticity[12]. When looking upon the collection of Western museums one can imagine the colonial project as vast and extensive. The penetration of colonial conquest has reached the roots of the 'old world' and its citizens' daily lives. Museum displays did not just signify colonial power but also betrayed the West's desire of 'object' ownership and the 'need' of exoticness. The dislocation of 'exotic' cultural fragments was justified

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[10] Harris, P.R. *British Museum Library*, The British Library, 1998, p 1.
[11] Spencer, R. C. & James, E. S. '*Locating Authenticity*' in Karp, I. (eds.) *Exhibiting Culture*, Smithsonian Institution Press p163.
[12] Root, D. *Cannibal Culture*, Westview Press, Oxford, 1996, p 45.

as a responsibility, ensuring protection from the savagery of the people who created them according to colonial rhetorics.

The Western museum is ironically not merely a storage facility and display but also a symbol of the benign protectors of human legacy. However, on a practical level, the Western museum is a place for public education. It provides a model for the public as a 'high end' of cultural practice. As Hudson points out, 'Museums are temples and their directors priests.'[13] The museum directors, as some believe, belong to the society's elite class and decide on the choice of museum collection and acquisition. The museum also represents a state of being civilized, according to the collectors. Interestingly, the museum has also been used as an instrument for political purposes. 'Western-style art museums are now deployed in the third world as a means of signaling to the West that one is a reliable political ally. It is a veneer of Western Liberalism that entails few political risks. The art museum in the Third World can reassure the West that, one is a safe bet for economic or military aid'[14]. It could further reassure its former colonial master of the willingness of maintaining a close relationship through the manifestation of the museum collections.

The museum is the warehouse of cultural objects and printed texts. It represents a convenience for the public to access cultural otherness as well as the history of one's own culture in a combined setting. The criticism of museum exhibitions is rooted in the way objects are displayed. Susan Pearce indicated that early ethnographic representations

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[13] Hudson, K. *A Social History of Museums*, Macmillan Press, London, p 53.

were motivated by a 'self-conscious definition of 'self'. With all that this implies, it can only be achieved in relation to a perceived 'Other', which is seen as different and (inevitably or otherwise is unclear), as inferior, unpleasant and dangerous'[15]. Once this misrepresentation of the other is established in the public, it will become a product of cultural reproduction. 'Museums have made it their business to reproduce other cultures for the visual consumption of their visitors. These representations, however, like the museums that house them, do not exist in a sanctified space removed from political processes.'[16]

It is very convenient to blame today's West for their past, and for the West to blame their others for the present breakdown of its democratic and rationalist traditions. While today's West advocates humanism, democracy, freedom of religion and free trade, stains of colonialism have been white washed. Therefore, what is this Diasporic resentment? Is it a matter of self-victimization? Or, is it the resistance of contemporary orientalism?

Colonialism and slavery (in a direct master and slave relationship) might be over, but the 'fruit' of Orientalism remains. It is a manifestation of power of knowledge. In the case of museum discourse, Ldchi states: 'a Museum will endow objects with importance and meaning because these come to represent certain kinds of cultural value. Museums are arbiters of meaning and the processes of making collecting plans, acquiring objects,

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[14] Ducan, C. 'Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship' in Karp, I. (eds.) Exhibiting Culture, Smithsonian Institution Press, London, 1991, pp 88-89.
[15] Pearce, S. M. On Collecting, Routledge, London, 1995,p 308.
[16] Riegel, H. 'Into the Heart of irony' in Macdonald, S. (eds.) Theorising Museums, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, 1996, p 82.

mounting displays requiring both symbolic and institutional power.'[17] This power of construction of knowledge is a form of Orientalist practice at the highest level. The museum's position in society makes it an absolute authority that cannot easily be challenged. Pearce further contended: 'the history of appropriation embedded in the stories of (and behind) the objects on display...to do with slavery, with the relations of freedom and non-freedom. Power and powerlessness...'[18] And further: 'It also means to define and rank people, to declare some as having a greater share than others in the community's common heritage - in its very identity.'[19]

While appreciating and accepting this case, I do not think that an artistic project is altogether served by the single-minded application of this polemic. It has to be offset with the kind of equivocation in which the argument puts the diasporic artist. I recognize the truth of the case; and yet I would not altogether artistically deplore the considerable collection of archaic Chinese bronzes and ceramics in the National Gallery of Victoria. Indeed, for the institution to lack such a collection would amount to chauvinistic neglect. As an artist conscious of the political implications of oriental collections, I oscillate between resentment and affection.

The presence of otherness in post-colonial Australia causes a kind of anxiety for the dominant group. 'We' (perhaps a coherent society) inherit a so called nineteenth-century evolutionism. Elizabeth Gertsakis mentioned that anthropology and ethnography have

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[17] Ldchi, H. 'The poetics and the Politics of exhibiting other cultures' in Hall, S. Representation, Sage Publications Ltd, London, 2000, p 205.
[18] Pearce, S. Museums and the Appropriation of Culture, The athlone Press, London, p 9.

constructed the 'world' as a great collection to the extent where it has consumed the world's culture as someone else's knowledge[20]. The collection means the existence of the Western museum, as the savior of the European other's traditional material and cultural productions. It claims such a high moral ground based on the condition of the rest of the world. The era of colonialism saw the non-European lands in a state of chaos and finally administrative dependency; and these nations did not have the capacity to conserve their own cultural belongings. Gertaskis further argues:

> In a Western society that is endeavoring to expand its nationalism as a sign of radical democracy, encouraging the entry of its minorities into the national archive under the mediation persistence of the anthropological model of tradition also encores continued ethical and moral instability in the system.[21]

Gertaskis's text helps me explain the use of books in *Bookshelf*. I use books rather than objects for two reasons. One is that the image of books is a symbol of human knowledge regardless of the self and the other. The other reason is that they have a connection to literature and graphical representation gathers more power and authority (in terms of perception) than the actual objects or circumstances of which they are the virtual representative. The power of words in this case resides in their distribution in publications. A literary narrative is as powerful as an image, especially during the time

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[19] Ducan, C. '*Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship*' in Karp, I. (eds.) *Exhibiting Culture*, Smithsonian Institution Press, London, 1991, p 102.
[20] Gertsakis, E. '*An inconstant politics: Thinking about the Traditional and the contemporary*' in Gunew, S. (eds) *Culture, Difference and the Arts*, Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd, NSW, 1994, p 36.
[21] Gertsakis, E. '*An inconstant politics: Thinking about the Traditional and the contemporary*' in Gunew, S. (eds) *Culture, Difference and the Arts*, Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd, NSW, 1994, p 36.

before the invention of television. Therefore it is capable of the compression of space and time into a two dimensional area.

I have tried to convey my personal distaste over colonialism and its after-effects through this sculpture in a somewhat satirical spirit. A fleet of sailing ships can be read as European triumph over others. Conversely, in the eye of the postcolonial spectator (the descendant of the colonized) this image can be associated with the social collective memory and history of colonization and shame. Orientalism on the other hand has been the other major effect of colonialism. A Greek temple façade is a celebratory symbol of Western civilization but enjoys a highly ambivalent role in postcolonial circumstances. A painting of a sailing ship is a good companion of this 'European triumph' and a reminder of the voracity of the European past and, perhaps by extension, the passive exclusion of others in present-day Eurocentric societies. One could allow for some spillage of this passive motif in the more general colonizing incursions of capital, products, messages and services by wealthy economies (ironically some signal Asian economies) into dependent economies (which include Australian and New Zealand).

Diasporic experience is not just an interaction between the host and new-comers. It triggers a colonial memory (for the descents of the colonized) and over sensitizes the awareness of the self and the other. Stewart Hall has explained my situation and the regurgitation of colonial history vividly:

Cultural identity belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything, which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being founded in mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves, the narratives of the past.[22]

The bookshelf in this sculpture not only represents one form of human knowledge but is perhaps a self-inserted identity and a reduction of being. It partially portrays a physical and mental entrapment within this colonial knowledge and construct of otherness. Power and knowledge are a powerful duet that can not be easily challenged. As the artwork suggests, the West is 'embracing' and 'encasing' an Eastern icon. As noted, I have used the Greek temple as a visual representation of Western power; and my ambivalent relationship to this archetype finds a kind of echo in the very core of Orientalism in terms of knowledge, namely a constructed identity of the European others. Two Hundred years of systematic misrepresentation - intended or otherwise - cannot be overthrown in an instant. It will always remain in the cycle of cultural reproduction passed on from generation to generation. To conduct deeds of misrepresenting the West in the Orient or other non-European worlds is not an answer. However, it is a Diasporic condition, where one will face the knowledge of otherness, fabricated since the time of colonialism. It is also an artistic challenge to deconstruct this colonial knowledge and to enlist new cultural integrity.

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[22] Hall, S. 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora' in Mirzoeff, N. (ed.) *Diaspora and Visual Culture*, Routledge, London, 2000, p 23.

Vault
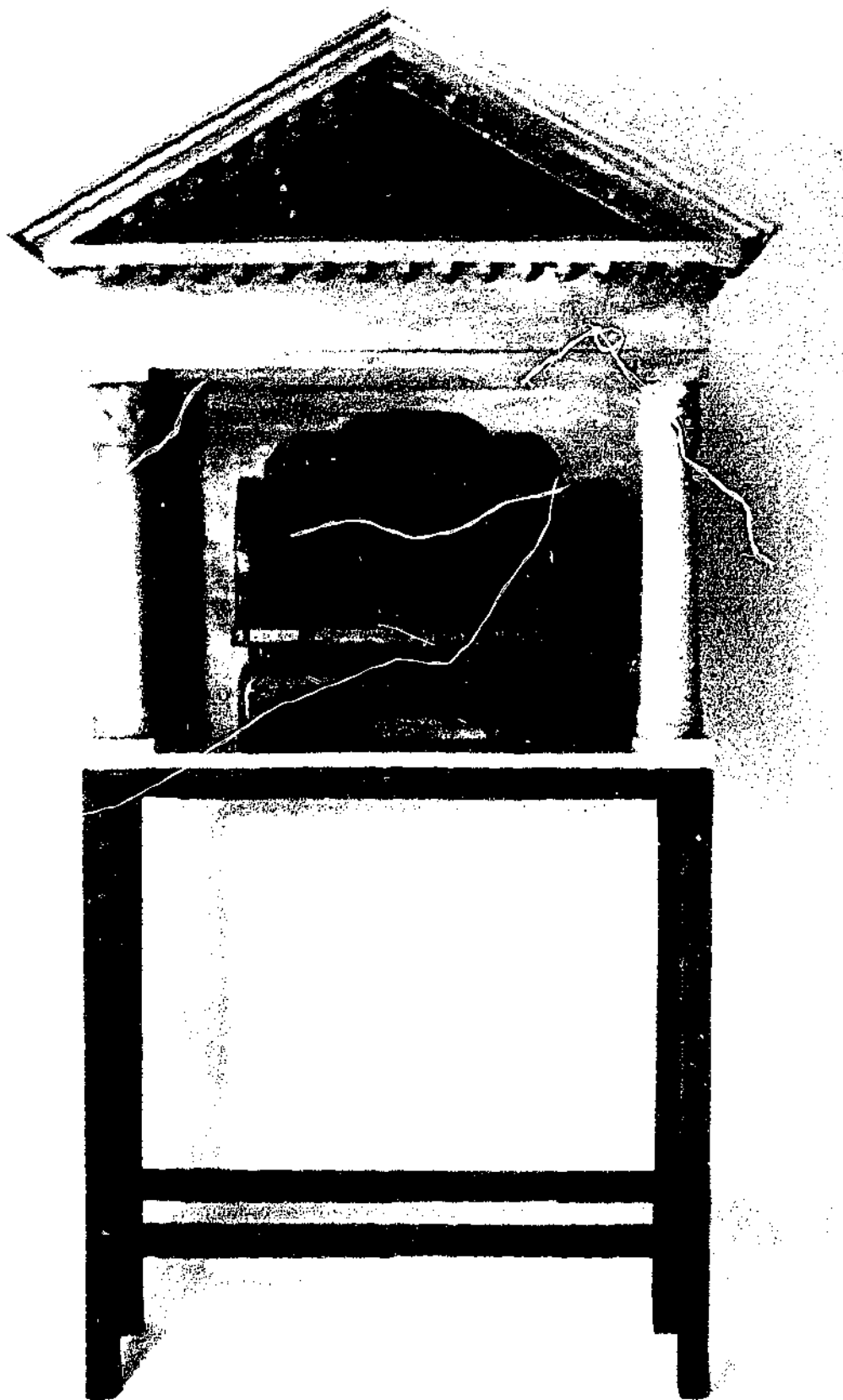
44.
Vault
Fiberglass and assorted timber
245 x 36 x 79 cm
2003

Chinese history, like that of most geo-political entities, is one of glory, genius, war, suffering and most of all tyranny. It is rather to be seen as a portion of human history and the one that most cultures have shared before any revolutionary redistribution of wealth and power and ultimately - albeit somewhat precariously - the emergence of democracy. The tyranny of Chinese history in particular comes not from the exterior oppression but the interior dynastic governance. There are few recorded cases in history referring to Chinese dynasties going out of their way to conquer others. If the conquest did happen it

was mostly under a threat of annihilation from Mongols or other northern warring tribes. If all diplomatic solutions failed (such as royal marriage) when facing such a threat from the north, the logical solution was to eliminate the threat by conquering them all together.

Chinese tyranny had a tendency to impose its imperial power towards it own people instead of populations beyond. The ruling class of China and its superiority had been built upon the suffering of the general population. The civilizational effort of the Chinese was directed toward the comfort of the dynastic ruling body. This ruling body was tiny in comparison to the bulk of the population. Thus the progress of civilization was inhibited because there was no middle class that was capable of demanding service and innovation. As long as the ruling body was well served, war was unlikely and the rulers would mostly be kind to their people. Alas, the benign ruler was also easily corrupted by the submissiveness of his people. Hence. dynastic change was necessary to renew the rulership of China.

China has changed dramatically since European imperialism. The first change was the nationalist revolution that ended the dynastic continuum. It has changed even more with the communist revolution and the current capitalist reform under communist reign. It is only now that China has a middle class and has the wealth to boost the desire for advancement in terms of civilization. Otherwise China will still be regarded as a continuum of its past, long perceived as chronically and incurably backward, except for the spectacular industrial and cultural successes of the non-mainland capitalist Chinas. The setting of the Western Museum and the situation of Chinese Diaspora are the

inspiration of this conception of the tyranny of China. The Museum display of their Chinese collection also triggered this philosophical discourse of historical Chineseness.

Vault began with the Greek temple façade as the representation of Western convention and aspiration. An ornate chair symbolizes the dynastic past of China and its tyranny. An Emperor's seat with ornaments requiring human labor, skill and time that represents his superiority, was built upon the labor and suffering of his people. Only the one who sits on top of the social pyramid of the time has the resources and rightful place to own it. The emblem that it embodies is structurally related to ownership, for it was a unique privilege to acquire such objects with the highest level of craftsmanship without being prosecuted. Therefore, the emperor's seat can be seen as an embodiment of his highest office, his kingdom and his tyranny. The entire nation was mobilized for the comfort of him and his extensions. Placing this chair inside a Greek temple involves an irony: an Emperor no longer exists but his carriage has became an object admired and despised by people of all sorts. The historical past that it represents runs parallel to the building that gives it shelter and protection. As was an object that was only produced to serve one man, after it is totally dislocated from its context, it is still a symbol of power, and wealth, an untouchable object to all but one.

Another aspect of this work is its Greek temple pediment. It contains the insignia of the British Empire, referring to Queen Victoria. Two types of tyranny are suggested, one being internal and one external. British imperialism has affected almost every continent of this world. Its imperial institutions and machines have extracted wealth and materials

for a population that is relatively small compared to the people and the landmass that supplies them.

The historical tyranny regarding China was not realized until I read certain texts by W.J.F. Jenner. Jenner was a Professor of Chinese and head of the China Center at the Australian National University in Canberra. He had translated many Chinese books such as *Chinese Lives* (Penguin 1989) and a Chinese classic *Journey to the West*. He also travels widely in China. His textual account of China makes a credible testimony. In his book *Tyranny of History*, he argued that one of the profound tyrannies of Chinese history has been the highly centralized control by the Han ruling class.[1] I must agree that this centralisation has influenced many institutions, from the language to various customs. Even the conquerors of the Han, such as the Mongols and the Manchus, were later "turned by historical labeling into Chinese dynasties"[2]. The term China is rather a generalization of at least seven major cultures in the region. It was after ages of war and assimilation that a unified identity was constructed. This history of homogeneity towards the Han as the sole representation of the 'Central Kingdom' as a history of tyranny is a thoughtful Western assertion. However, one might argue that this is a cultural strength that kept China united as a solid mass during and after the ruin of imperialism. Muriel Evelyn Chamberlain has stated:

> In 1900 it seemed impossible that China would escape partition by Russia, Germany, Britain, France, Italy and the United States. It was not military power,

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[1] Jenner, W.J.F. *The Tyranny of History*, Penguin Books, 1992, p 3.
[2] Ibid. p 4.

which saved her, although the Chinese did resist strenuously in 1839-42 and again in 1856-60. In 1900, avenging the attack on their embassies during the Boxer Rebellion, the armies of Britain, France, Germany, America and Japan reached and occupied the Chinese capital of Peking. China was saved partly by the watchful jealousy of the great powers, whose rivalry also kept the Ottoman Empire intact until the First World War, but equally important was the surviving political unity of the country. China was not fragmented into many political unites as was Africa. The dynasty was weak but not yet crumbling, as was the Mogul Empire when the British obtained control of India. The Chinese confidence in the virtues of their one civilization and their suspicion of, and contempt for, foreigners meant that there were very few 'collaborators' among the Chinese. Collaborators were an essential element in the imposition of colonial rule. But paradoxically, they also helped to generate those very forces, which were ultimately to overthrow colonial government[3].

This demonstrated the power of the historically homogenized Han assertion which has been imprinted on its citizens. It had been fossilized through the ages so much that it did not yield to Western imperialism. Hence, my aim to use Jenner's impression of China was initially brought about in a reactive or defiant spirit. I have every tendency to oppose everything that Jenner has said about China. The notion of Orientalism and Western assertion have a tendency to form a one-sided and sometimes inaccurate cultural critique. I believe no matter how hard Jenner tries to be objective (maybe not his agenda) I can not

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[3] Chamberlain, M.E. *Decolonization: The Fall of the European Empires*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1999, p 14.

help detecting some kind of smugness, because he tends to dismiss the 'value' of the history and culture of China when compared to the West. There are also some inadequacies in his writing of Chinese history such as that he mentions the nationalist revolution having been racist against the Manchu population. This is dubious because the founder of modern China, Sun Yi Shain, drafted China's first constitution, which lists all major cultures in the region including Manchurians to have the same rights as Chinese citizens. There was never any tendency towards racial segregation as in so many European colonies at the time. He offered the possibility of constitutional monarchy that maintained the throne of the Ching Dynasty. The reason why the Ching Dynasty came to an end was its unwillingness to adopt Constitutionalism. Joseph Esherick has noted that constitutionalism had made Japan strong, and Constitutionalism could strengthen the Chinese state and nation. A constitutional government would guarantee greater popular interest in the nation's fate, ensure effective implementation of central government decrees, and eliminate the domination of clerks and petty bureaucrats over local government. The Ching court made few public moves towards implementation but it proceeded slowly and methodically to make for a gradual transition to constitutional government following the Japanese model. In December 1907 a constitutionalist paper became outspoken and warned that when people were awakened to demand a constitution, they would persist even if blood had to flow to be able to get it. The reluctance of the Ching court to implement a constitution led to the inevitable 1911 revolution that overthrew the Ching dynasty.[4] "Indeed even after the revolution had been going on for two months, the revolutionary head quarters to Wuhan acknowledged that anti

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[4] Esherick, J. W. *Reform and revolution in China*, University of California Press, London, 1976, p 92.

Manchuism took priority over republicanism by offering to accept a constitutional monarchy as long as the ruler was a Chinese."[5]

However, Jenner's notion of historical tyranny may yet be a source of Diasporic inspiration for art. He may not be accurate according to all aspects of historical method, but his notion of historical tyranny is a powerful motif which is true to the cynical imagination and hence a legitimate source of Diasporic inspiration.

Professor Bo Wei Shin has mentioned that when dealing with the outcome of Sino-logical research, we as a people of the East must be bold to point out the flaw of cultural critique and still have the composure to listen and to accept critics and avoid an emotional response like the one that led to the Boxer rebellion[6]. This has revealed a personal emotional association with the Mainland China as a matter of love and hate. "China is a figment of the imagination, of many imaginations"[7], that even to me as a Chinese person who has never set foot on the mainland. I am on the one hand wanting China to become a powerful nation, stand side by side with other leading nations in world politics and be free from any future imperialism imposed by the West. On the other hand I stand by the ground of Taiwan, hoping that China can perhaps one day soften its stance over the sovereignty of its borders and give room for Taiwan's international relations that can ultimately lead to the collapse of its current autocratic unity. The solution of China's history of tyranny that is suggested by Jenner is parallel with the latter. He believed that

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[5] Sheridan, J. E. *China in disintegration*, The Free Press, New York, 1975, p 43
[6] Bo, W-S and Y Z-S (eds.) *Sinologist on China*, Choun Chen publishing, Taipei, 1993, p 3.
[7] Jenner, W.J.F. *The Tyranny of History*, Penguin Books, 1992, p 3.

the revival of local awareness and identity might be a way out of the current autocratic control as the continuance of historical tyranny.[8] Jenner himself has predicted a catastrophic outcome, because every ancient state that exists inside the current regime will want to have the best access to resources and even nuclear capabilities. He said:

> China is so littered with nuclear explosives, both literal and metaphorical, that the country is at any time only a short time away from going up. Nobody can deal with the underlying problems of inner China, and it may only be a matter of time before the primitive rebellion that on a small scale is endemic in some regions gets out of control, setting off all sorts of other explosions.[9]

One other indisputable fact of Jenner's notion of the tyranny of history was the fact that "Chinese history does not have any abrupt changes"[10]. It does not count on the dynastic changes that lead to wars and bloodshed but the very fundamental change of social dynamics. Bo has indicated that if we managed to dislocate a person from the Han dynasty (206BC-23AD) and place him in the Ching dynasty (1644-1912) he would not notice much social change except the change of regime and some minor differences of daily necessities.[11] Hegel had stated in the same manner that Chinese history is not really a history but rather a loop of dynastic continuum, because it lacks change, new life and advancement[12]. Hugo also mentioned that major difference between the Chinese history

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[8] Jenner, W.J.F. *The Tyranny of History*, Penguin Books, 1992, pp 227-248.
[9] Ibid. p 248.
[10] Bo, W-S and Y Z-S (eds.) *Sinologist on China*, Choun Chen publishing, Taipei, 1993, p52.
[11] Ibid. p 52.
[12] Ibid. p 51.

and most histories of other civilizations is that it has been so well documented in the form of writing.[13] This notion runs perfectly parallel with Jenner's thought on Chinese language as homogenized control and as a record of its course.[14]

I agree with Hegel on account of the three criteria - change, new life and advancement - that he set up, because every dynasty in China repeated its predecessor. There was always a mass destruction during regime change, then a re-building, a golden age, and consequently a decline that led to another struggle for a new ruler. This so-called historical change of non-history was caused by the dynastic nature of Chinese civilization that formed and inspired the construction of this sculpture and its relation to Diaspora.

The Emperor's chair in the setting of this work is not only a symbol of power. It also represents 'the general acceptance of the doctrine of the Mandate of Heaven from the earliest days of Chinese history ensuring that Chinese ruler would always be absolutist in theory.'[15] Chinese Emperor (as the institution had always been referred to) literally means 'son of heaven'. The chair is reproduced in this setting to gesture toward the very core of Chinese tradition that is the sense of family as the sense of nation. Before the revolution, China never had a constitution or a declaration of human rights. The ancient Chinese had little sense of self up till the nineteenth century. The Confucian teaching of piety had suppressed human desires. According to Confucian teachings, a man is born to

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[13] Bo, W-S and Y Z-S (eds.) *Sinologist on China*, Choun Chen publishing, Taipei, 1993, p 51.
[14] Jenner, W.J.F. *The Tyranny of History*, Penguin Books, Vic, 1994. p 123.
[15] Hucker C.O. *China's Imperial Past*, Stanford University Press, Standford, California 1975,p 303.

be devoted to his parents. As a parent he then devotes himself to his extended family as a community. Sheryl Wudunn has questioned the effect of Confucian teaching, she states:

> Confucius, who has inspired intellectuals for the past twenty-five centuries. never emphasized the individual things, and that has had a profound influence on the Chinese nation...Chinese artists were painting magnificent scrolls in which humans were just specks, like a tiny monk observing a huge waterfall. How will China accommodate the monk's aspirations and ambitions today?[16]

Human desire was ignored by the rulers of China who adopted the teaching of Confucius. In fact during the time of the Chu Dynasty (1027-256 B.C.) there were many political doctrines emerging and developing. Some of the teachings may have led China as a civilization to a different outcome but only Confucian ideals prevailed, which shaped the mentality of the Chinese people into 'selfless drones' of the Empire. This devotion in terms of piety stretched to the setting of the Chinese nation where the Emperor was the sole parent of his people (children). People devoted their produce and their lives to serve their Emperor and in return, the emperor would be kind to them like a parent. From this cause, China was governed by a man rather then a system. When the emperor was corrupt the whole nation suffered corruption, but if the emperor was kind and able, it was marked as a golden age. The Emperor's throne is like the chair in every ancient Chinese household. A statue of authority dictates the fate of the Emperor's people, an image that represents the effort of the Chinese civilization and its inadequacy.

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[16] Wudunn, S. & Kristof, N. D. *China Wakes*, Times Books, New York, 1994, p 56.

Francis Fukuyama the author of *The End of History and the Last Man* points out that there is a parallelism in Japan as well as in most East Asian societies. The primary social group to which individuals in most of Asia owe deference, is the family. The benevolent authority of a father over his children was the original model for authority relations. He also mentioned that in the United States and to most Western families that, young children are expected to defer to the authority of their parents, but as they start growing older, they begin to assert their own identity against their parents.[17]

The throne of the Chinese Emperor in *Vault* may signify the absolute power of so called non-history of Chinese history. Situating it inside a Greek temple façade may imply that the Greek temple in the same token, bears a similar tyrannical stigma only for one that is familiar with history and colonization. The difference is that one becomes the dominant force of the world and the other struggles to maintain its integrity.

The ancient Greeks who talked democracy were the ones who also owned slaves. The Greek temple as a Western representation runs all the way to the Victorian age. The pediment of this sculptural representation of the Greek temple is inserted with the emblem of Queen Victoria. She was the Queen who allowed her people to impose the power and authority of their nation to tyrannize all continents in the world. Her tyranny was outward rather than internal.

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[17] Fukuyama, F. *The End of History and the Last Man*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1992, p 239.

The Greek temple façade does not necessarily solely represent Europe's colonial past and its hegemony over culture outside the Western world. It also describes a condition of the Chinese as an entity that bears a history of a people that the West perceived as selfless drones of the dynasty. The Chinese mind, as I like to describe it, is a dynastic mind. Chinese modern institutions whether on the mainland or on some historical extensions like Taiwan or Singapore (though not Hong Kong), are more or less dependent on the rule of a man rather than the rule of the system. Man is an imperfect creation with many flaws. However, this dynastic mind might have allowed a Chinese to be preserved as Chinese in the situation of social dislocation.

Hence, the Greek temple connotes a condition of the Chinese in the West where such a condition has an abundance of historical implications of how the Chinese are portrayed in the West. It also signifies that such tradition is just as old as the Chinese Emperor's throne, represents.

Jenner was right about this aggressiveness and absolute control that the Chinese political systems have imposed on their people. It can be argued that the current Communist regime was a foreign influence and it has been used for internal oppression and control. The Dynastic regime has changed but its method remains the same. Chinese people in the mainland still psychologically refer to their leader as their dynastic father.

The backwardness of China has been contributed to by its dynastic tyranny. More profoundly, the Emperor did not only suppress the desires of his people but also inhibited

the growth of geniuses. There were many great minds in the West who had the freedom to pursue knowledge of nature and utilize it to shape the future and history of their nation to a 'better' end. But in imperial China "knowledge was a monopoly of the emperor, because knowledge was power, only the emperor was supposed to have it, and he wouldn't share it with others"[18]. The genius mind of the 'old' China was confined to the study of literature in a somewhat chauvinistic way. It was the kind of literature that reinforced the teachings of Confucian thought, rather than a philosophical debate of the Chinese convention at the time. Even at the time of the Ching Dynasty when facing annihilation by Western imperialism, there was still a resistance to learn mathematics as the foundation of science, because the scholarly class dismissed it as the knowledge of savages.

Chinese tradition and its historical tyranny have been under the scrutiny of the Western spotlight for some time, in the first instance from prejudice and now through analysis based on dialectical premises which do not favor them. The differences between China and the West is that the West has evolved and changed from its tyrannical past (at least in respect of its own subjects) whereas Chinese historical tyranny still carries on.

China is my distant kingdom of hope, of pride, of disgust and an identity not to be separated. I as an artist, self-inserting myself to that well-crafted throne, under the temple of Western knowledge, contemplating.

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[18] Sandall, R. *The Culture Cult, Designer Tribalism and Other Essays*, Westview Press, Colorado, 2001, p 135.

Imprint

45.
Imprint
Assorted timber with oil paint
234 x 78 x 34 cm
2003

Travel migration and movements invariably bring us up against the limits of our inheritance. We may choose to withdraw from this impact and only select a confirmation of our initial views. In this case, whatever lies on the other side remains in the shadows, in obscurity. We could, however, opt to slacken control, to let ourselves go, and respond to the challenge of a world that is more extensive than the one we have been accustomed to inhabiting.[1]

Chineseness today in the situation of diaspora, is an imprint of history that began since the first encounter between China and the Western world. It holds in reverse when the West is under the same scrutiny. Recognition of a historical imprint has its discontents. A person who lives outside his or her native cultural territory is thought to be imprinted with the history of cultural projection and perception of the hosting population. The thought is seldom joyful.

This sculpture *Imprint* is still based on the Greek temple façade as an underling visual platform for most of this visual research. Its surface is covered with a collage of images from many sources that resemble different times and different cultures. This graphic covering is like a tattoo or a fossilized memory embedded in the human mind. In dealing with the image of the past and present I am confronted with the visual content of human culture. 'The image of the past is often ignored, distorted, revised, transmitted, and received in specific cultural contexts.'[2] I have no intention to claim that my

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[1] Chambers, I. *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*, Routledge, London, 1995, p 115.
[2] Schwarz, B. & Kim, M-K. *Honor, Dignity, and Collective Memory*, in Cerulo, K. A. *Culture in Mind*, Routledge, New York, 2002, p 210.

representation of the cultural image is correct in its account of history; indeed, they bear a personal distortion. In this work there is no solid representation of China, because (a) diasporic Chinese are subject to multiculturalism - in the sense that a Chinese person who speaks Indonesian and lives with Indonesian institutions is likely to be different to a Chinese person who speaks English and lives among American institutions - and (b) Chineseness is saturated in the historical imprint of cultural perception; and consciousness of what it is to be Chinese in this circumstance is influenced by the construction that the host-culture puts on it.

For all of this, there is a reciprocal Chinese critique of the West. When facing a world plagued with intolerance of differences and unjustified cultural critique, it is difficult not to seek cultural retribution. In the midst of cultural awareness and inner struggle of self-justification in the diaspora, a given individual such as myself is likely to be consumed by the force of anger. However retribution is far from my intent. I would rather reverse the mechanisms of sino-cultural critique whom the ideology resides.

When I first saw the Greek temple façade, I did not see its historical content but admired its aesthetics and the way it projected the power of monumentality. Later I visualized its glory and its religious and even military sagas that resulted from the learning of secondary history textbooks. This one-dimensional personal construct of the visualization of the Greeks and Romans has ignored their tyranny, chauvinism and the continuation of their historical extensions. I romanticized the image of Greco-Roman artifacts in the times when 'Westernisation' was the norm in the non-Western world. Any association

with the West was intoxicating in terms of a sense of being part of the clarity of Western culture and a disassociation with the backwardness of the Asiatic. Hence, a Greek building in this context is not only an architectural style but also a radiant symbol, a medium for contemplating the Western social, cultural and historical conditions. It is just as true when contemplates the imperial building of China.

All architectures bears some sort of cultural meanings; the multiplication of the Greek temple motif as a European International Style reinforced one particular cultural event and its ideology. "In most cultures, building is marked by ceremonies that help reinforce the culture's identity. The persistence of such rituals is indicative of people's need to use the activity of building to reinforce the deeper meaning of their culture."[3] The Ancient Greek temple, by the same token, represents different sets of political ideologies. There were different revivals of Greek and Roman ideals in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Europe. The applications range from the rationalist movements that led to democracy to the shameless pronouncement and affirmation of colonial supremacy. The nations adopting this slightly duplicitous ideology thought its citizens and culture were above all else.

The ceremonies that were once performed inside and outside of the façades of Greek temples are no longer for mythical Gods but have been replaced with activities that still reinforce the identity of the culture and the people who erected them. Libraries represent wisdom and knowledge. When I set foot into a building like the Victorian State Library it

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[3] Davis, H. *The Culture of Building*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1999, p 90.

reminds me of Platonic times where many modern Western sciences, and philosophies were first debated and formulated, rather as celebrated in Raphael's *School of Athens*. While the surroundings might have changed and the people who walk in and out of such buildings might be different from those of classical times, the core of its significance is unchanged. Parliaments give a sense of the Roman forum and senate where politics were discussed and policies implemented. These readings of the Greek temple façade celebrate an educated imagination and a retrieval of lofty human memory.

In the act of capturing the conceptual properties of this building type, I am also trying to impose a personal projection of it without altering much of its original structure. On the surface of this sculpture, the painting is presented in a color that is predominantly red. Red symbolizes sanguine human desires but also horror, as in the face of Mars according to Virgil. It connotes aggression and spilt blood. The color red is the stain of sacrifices for a god. In most cases of early human religion a temple was a place to propitiate future action and to show one's devotion to a god; and such dedication was expressed through the sacrifice of animals and sometimes humans. This red covering of a temple is a contradiction to the color white that is conventionally thought of as a symbol of purity, wisdom and harmony. And in the aesthetic language of post-Hellenic Western tradition, this whiteness is especially prestigious through the illustrious material of marble. It is an irony, given that Greek temples were painted in colours which are somewhat a matter of conjecture. But they did not have the pristine and virgin luminosity of the naked marble.

The images depicted on the painted surface include portraits and icons that represent significant events defining the realization of this sculpture. These images are realistic and can be read without much explanation. The projection of these mixed image bear several contents. The first is the passage of time. The second is the complexity of culture and the third is the effect of cultural reproduction.

The imprint of history as I like to address it is the stigma of culture, a burden attached to a population because of ancestry, language and physical difference. A huge diversity of insults about China and the Chinese in the forms of social critique or bigotry could be cited. These discourses are generally not based on objective observations; they move from anecdote relative to individuals to the absolute with grotesque slippages. "Cultural relativism, generally, is based on a politically motivated exaggeration of differences."[4] These exaggerations have their referred subjects 'cornered' within the rhetoric of cultural critique and imprinted on them (Chinese) as a new identity. Such phenomena are not new but have been practiced before the sixteenth-century. Ana Bacigalupo as says:

> Many cultures in the world believe that their belief practices are in fact superior to that of others. Many cultures' own name for themselves means 'human' or 'people' meaning that other people are not. In adopting the notions of cultural relativism and using it in relation to other cultures are we being ethnocentric? If

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[4] Risan, L. *Culture Relativism,* and Sokal Affair http://folk.uio.no/lrisan/index.html 2000, 17 Jan 2003.

you don't use the notion of cultural relativism are you supporting rampant ethnocentrism?[5]

If we look at other populations purely based on our own values, their existence in many cases will not meet our standards. 'The only kinds of truths we can accept in our encounters with others are our own. We have to relativise their truths. The moment we take their statements at face value we take their statements seriously on common premises, not on culturally relative premises.'[6] The imprint of history and culture on given human subjects is an affirmation of the distinguishing and the amplifying differences. Lars Risan has stated that:

> A culture is an abstraction, and the boundaries between these abstract entities are fluent, fuzzy and contested. The other the 'primitives' or the 'third world' etc...are only analytically separable from us...despite this common realization, many anthropologists, also the 'postmodernists' still exaggerate the difference. An important reason to this is that it enables cultural critique.[7]

It is true that without these exaggerations the notion of the other can be as superficial as the color of our skin. Seen thus, cultural critique can act like a veneer replacing the truth of a given culture. The painted surface as a covering of this sculpture, reflects this metaphorical propriety of cultural imprint. However, the practice of cultural relativism

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[5] Bacigalupo, A. M. *Cultural Relativism and Ethnocentrism*, http://casourses.buffalo.edu/classes/apy/anab/apy106 17 Jan 2003.

[6] Risan, Lars *Culture Relativism and Sokal Affair*, http://folk.uio.no/lrisan/index.html 2000, 17 Jan 2003.
[7] Ibid.

and cultural critique is performed on the basis of unequal power. That is the critique of the powerless from the critique of powerful. Ana Bacigalupo has also mentioned:

> A good deal of cultural relativism may be necessary when the encounters are asymmetrical in terms of power, and when we (who employ a culture relativist attitude) are the powerful partners of the encounter. The subordinated cannot enforce his or her premises on the powerful, obviously that's why there is a power relationship. The encounter does not become a dialogue. To apply cultural relativism in such a case is not a way to understand the other, it may also be a way to give the other a voice with which to be heard. It, say the anthropologist, can 'translate' the culture of the powerless into the language of the powerful, than perhaps, the anthropologist can become a spokesperson of the powerless and a cultural imperialist invasion can be tweaked in the direction of a dialogue.[8]

The Greek temple, as I perceive it after post-secondary education, bears imperialist content. 'It reflects on once imperial society that related to a certain social class, the class of masters, otherwise known as the aristocracy, who derived their social status from their willingness to risk their lives in bygone days.'[9] However, those aristocrats no longer exist and the operation of imperialism continues in a different form. In terms of historical projection as far as the Greek temple is concerned, it is the visualizing of the architecture as the bearer of a space-time continuum. The Greek temple was a place of worship but is

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[8] Bacigalupo, A. M. *Cultural Relativism and Ethnocentrism,* http://casourses.buffalo.edu/classes/apy/anab/apy106 17 Jan 2003.

[9] Fukuyama, F. *The End of History and the Last Man,* Hamish Hamilton, London, 1992, p 259.

now a symbol of power and a representation of political institutions. It resonates with Western prowess of a political, epistemological and military influences. 'This point amounts to religion as well as the recognition of one's own gods and idols by other peoples.'[10] The projection of its influence cuts through many layers of human society by the forces and the people who used and erected these temple and at the same time conducting horrendous deeds in the world.

My perception on the resurrection of Greek icons in Australia is a form of historical and cultural imprint on the residing cultural landscape. A historical imprint is the stigma of an add-on identity according to a perceptual force and memory. The imprint can also be perceived as a projection of culture. In which case, the painted surface of this sculpture also serves as a projection of a Diasporic mind. There are certainly many artists in the world who have reflected on the image of the Greek temple façade in their own unique ways. One prime example would be the use of classical motifs in postmodern architecture and in other art forms. The scope of this research cannot catalogue such phenomena.

"A landscape shaped and shaping the people living there, becoming a bank of cultural memories - some still in use, others as residues of past practices and knowledge"[11]. If the landscape is a primary source for the perception of a local culture, then the buildings become the secondary source. I have mentioned the perceptual properties of the Greek temple façade in previous chapters. Within this work I am further contemplating and visualizing the invisible. The invisible refers to its historical content and an ever-

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[10] Fukuyama, F. *The End of History and the Last Man*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1992, p 59.
[11] Crang, M. *Cultural Geography*, Routledge, London, 1998, p 23.

changing space-time like the imprint of a memory that does not necessary exit in individuals but in devices that store human history. My pursuit of the historical meaning of a secondary cultural landscape is not just to ignore its present symbolic landscape because "ancient landscapes have given different interpretations over time indicating the way the meaning of places can become a matter of political contest".[12] As in certain examples of postmodern architecture, I am giving the Greek temple façade a renewed position that is beyond its decorative and ornamental capacities; but the ironies that I see are not about modernity or the clash of archaic conventions with contemporary building materials and institutions. The land and time that it occupied in human memory are part of the product of cultural reproduction and the perception of otherness.

In speaking of memory I do not mean a kind of collective memory that measures universal truth. In fact there can never be a universal truth of human collective memory. After all we are all individuals and our memories are based on personal circumstances such as culture, education, and individual cognition of a particular object or event. Barry Schwartz and Mik Young Kim conducted a survey of a group of American and Korean students' thoughts about their nations' past in terms of pride and shame[13]. The chosen students were given questionnaires outlining major events that they considered the most honorable and most shameful. The results Schwartz and Kim analyzed were that 'American students rested on political ideals - liberty, egalitarianism, individualism, populism, and *laissez faire* - rather than common race, ethnicity, or religion...they take

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[12] Crang, M. *Cultural Geography*, Routledge, London, 1998, p 39.
[13] Schwarz, B. & Kim, M-K. *Honor, Dignity, and Collective Memory*, in Cerulo, K. A. *Culture in Mind*, Routledge, New York, 2002, p 210.

shame about events that exemplify and violate these ideals'[14] On the other hand "Korean students react to trauma and injustice not only by resentment of the perpetrators but also by self-blame."[15] Schwartz and Kim further state that the Koreans' sense of pride rests on essentially international recognition. 'All nations rely on international perceptions as a reference point for their won esteem, but Koreans push this tendency much further than most.'[16]

This social study demonstrates a fundamental difference in the cognition of one's national past. We can not use it literarily to measure the differences between the West and East, but it can be used as a model in broader terms. In fact if one reads the writings about the cultural critique of contemporary China (and its external states) by Chinese scholars, one could find that they are more apologetic than finger-pointing. In many cases they think they should take some blame for their failures in the debates that involve the history of colonialism and imperialism. Perhaps this is one of the virtues of Confucian thinking or perhaps they simply write in a way that may please the readers of the West.

When thinking about studying cultures of the world, we have to be aware that well-intentioned claims for a universal, objective science have been deeply implicated in racist and imperialist pasts. Claiming to speak from nowhere for everywhere has often meant speaking from the position of a white Western man.[17]

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[14] Schwarz, B. & Kim, M-K. *Honor, Dignity, and Collective Memory*, in Cerulo, K. A. *Culture in Mind*, Routledge, New York, 2002, p 222.
[15] Ibid. p 223.
[16] Schwarz, B. & Kim, M-K. *Honor, Dignity, and Collective Memory*, in Cerulo, K. A. *Culture in Mind*, Routledge, New York, 2002, p 223.
[17] Crang, M. *Cultural Geography*, Routledge, London, 1998, p 28.

Projecting images onto a Greek edifice may have other metaphoric meanings. They may relate to chaos corrupting order. The brush strokes inevitably work against the clarity of Greek logic, for the austere perfection of Greek design provides no toe-hold for difference; it is inhospitable to individual inscriptions. I feel that this relates to a perception that commonly differentiates Western and non-Western cultures. Most profoundly, I find that in search of the Chineseness in a Diasporic condition, one can not escape from the imprint of history and culture of the residing land. Architecture just happens to be a marking of a given landscape that reveals a given history and culture. I don't just see a Greek building but I see the imprint of its history and projection. The projecting of images onto a building is intended to signify the contradictory union between the inevitably chaotic and the ideally - but exclusively - ordered, a union of passion and logic that are the respective virtues in the perennial totalized description of the East and West.

Part Three

Chineseness

Entrapment

46.
Entrapment
Assorted timber and fiberglass
278 x 45 x 87 cm
2002

The assertion of the self is one of the main concerns of this research, because the underlying condition is social dislocation, where the 'self' undergoes a series of transformations and faces many challenges when residing in a foreign land. The condition has many poetic paradoxes and artistic connotations associated with the confrontation of culture and the position of identity.

Diaspora is the rhetoric of cross-cultural influences. In terms of art, a sense of self is represented in many different allegorical methods. In the case of *Entrapment*, the figure trapped in the Greek temple seems to be a reflection of the self. It resembles the image of a Buddha in a reclining position with a hand holding a miniature temple. This position is not a common posture among most statues of Buddha because the posture was used to signify the moment before his death. The figure in this work may suggest many intentions.
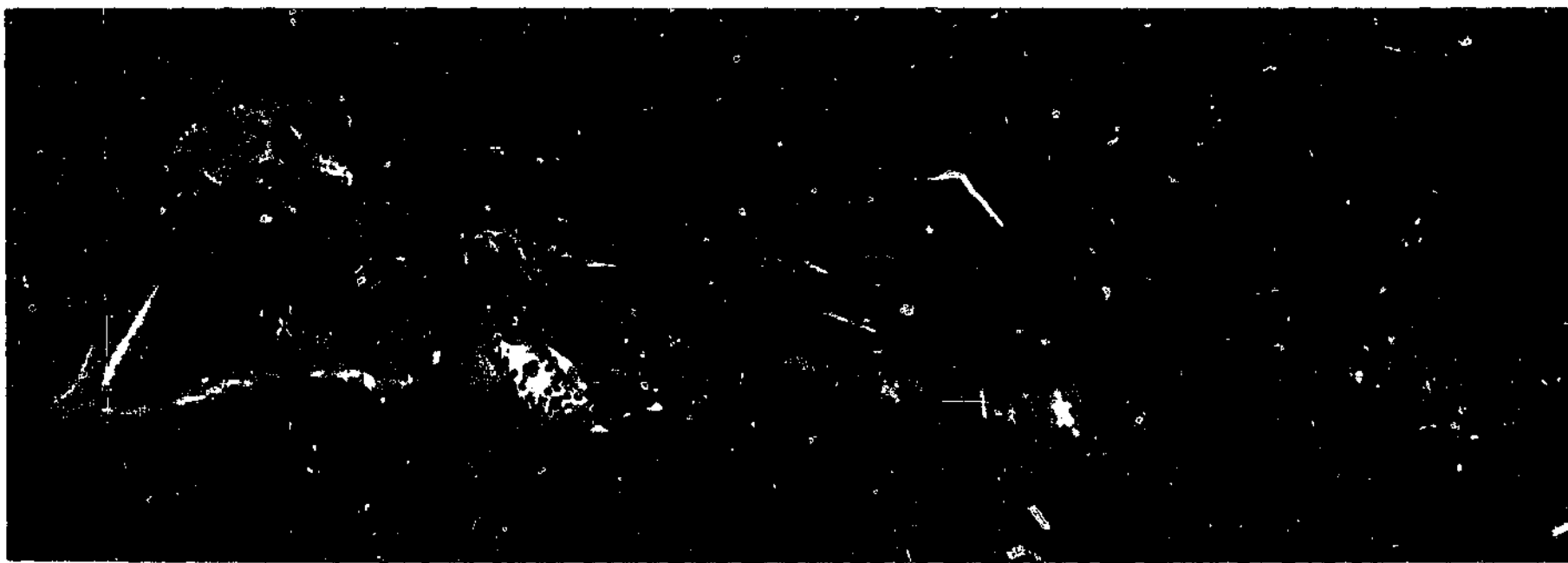
47.
Buddha
Burma, 19th century
Copper alloys set with mirror-glass.
Length 68cm
OA 1891.2-25.1
Source:
Zwalf, W.(ed.) Buddhism art and faith British Museum
Publications limited, 1985, London, 1985, p 163.

The moment before Buddha's death might suggest a transformation, because the death of Buddha did not end his existence but was rather an elevation of Buddha's physical presence to a spiritual one. This relaxed position as I see it might also suggest a cultural decay in the situation of social dislocation. Cultural objects or subjects lose their cultural vigor, because there is no historical and cultural support to maintain a tradition at its maximum integrity. According to historical facts and findings, one might argue

134

dislocation should not incur such decrement of cultural vigor. Nevertheless, my argument is about the sense of cultural perception that has not always been understand with cultural correctness in mind. "As a symbol, cultural identity is often transformed into a fixed and rigid construct"[1]. The representation of Buddha in a Greek temple also means social dislocation can provide an escape without carrying cultural baggage that is closely linked with a particular landscape. However, in a new cultural environment, one will face a new kind of scrutiny according to the authority of the host culture. Similarly, Nikos Papastergiadis has expressed:

"Stories and images of the self, on what ground do they rest when the 'I' has been dislocated from home? Who is represented under the sign of "I" when the boundaries of the self seem unstable and the history of identity uncertain? The radical transformations of modernity have fundamentally altered the form and representation of identity. The social and the personal are always intertwined. Migration is often severed but symbolic links and cultural values persist within the memories and adaptive practices of migrants."[2]

Hence, within this line of thought, self-representation in this visual inquiry can become a construct of identity. In the process of the conceptualization of the self, the path is not a clear one, but full of contradictions and conflicts that provides and supports this artistic creativity.

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[1] Papastergiadis, N., *Dialogues in the Diasporas*, Rivers Oram Press, London, 1998, p 177.
[2] Ibid. p169.

The physical setting of the work *Entrapment* proposes a display. The Greek temple façade can be perceived as a stage (originally for religious mise en scene but later for projection of Hellenic virtue in nineteenth-century modernity) that might imply the artificiality of the corporal existence of artists in Diaspora. This is because the pressure of the cultural and racial perception of a new geographical environment masks the true sense of the self. The temple is an architectural containment and exhibition venue of cultural objects. An oversized Buddha situated inside a Greek temple is a device for the juxtaposition of significance of size. The proportion of the figure and architecture signifies the importance and weight of the figure. While Buddha is after all a representation of divinity, through my portrait, the figure is not necessarily a sincere imitation but a vehicle for perceptual purposes. This disproportionate setting has betrayed an intention of 'breaking out' of such confinement. Yet, the oversized figure is still contained within a rigid and powerful architectural structure.

The image of Buddha has now become a culturally cliched image. For much of the Asian population, it is an image of worship and inspiration. For some object collectors in the West, it is a source of cultural inspiration and an ornament for interior or garden decoration. As for Western believers of Buddhism (apparently growing in number relative to Christianity), it can also be an image of spiritual guidance. Therefore, how did the image of Buddha become a cliché? It is the congealed exotic Oriental rather than an image of spiritual worship. In the realm of antiques, the Buddha image is reproduced to suit contemporary interior decorations. It is an image of divinity but also an image stigmatized as the result of European colonial expansion (and clearly not the jealous God

of Hebraic tradition). The statue of Buddha was handled and removed without any respect. Buddha had come from sacred representation to material acquisition by Oriental others. Colonialism hence becomes a liability that haunts the Western consciousness and Western scholarship over the perception and study of otherness.

Buddha images are now displayed in Euro-centric museums that carry a sense of entrapment. It is a displacement of objects coinciding with the displacement of human subjects. The *entrapment* might be self-asserted representation, because the Buddha in this work is not a direct imitation but a perceptual portrait. It signifies a cultural cliché as well as a racial stereotype. Its pictorial entrapment suggests the paradox of cultural scholarship and the artistic upbringing.

The image of Buddha is perhaps an embodiment of the traditional Asian ideal of the Asiatic face with a Western origin. Before Alexander the Great's incursion in India, the representation of Buddha had no figure but was represented in a range of symbols that belonged to architectural elements.[3] As Alexander's army and a large array of academics and professionals came with him to the conquest of Western India during 326BC, the influence of Greek sculpture became apparent in India's representation of Buddha. The image of Buddha assumed a human form and the way exterior drapery was depicted showed a strong Greek influence.[4] The spiritual worship of Buddha had now become a worship of idols in statuary. Buddha had materialized into a physical form that could be altered and managed according to human desires. It is why today we have many different

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[3] Lai, S-G., *Art of Buddha*, Artist, Taipei, 1994, p 10.
[4] Ibid. pp10-11

kinds of Buddha statues adopted by many different cultures. *Entrapment* is, by the same token, reflecting this materiality of culture and representation, as if idolatry had a marketable afterlife. The object is the prime target of this visual inquiry. Buddha portrayed in this sculpture symbolized the fetishism and the love of objects.

48.
Close-up of Buddha and miniature temple.

The Buddha image in the work *Entrapment*, is holding a miniature Greek temple. It is logical to assume that within that temple another Buddhist figure is situated. This is not a new pictorial trick but based on an optical phenomenon. If we place two mirrors facing each other, any image that appears in the mirror will be reflected in between the two mirrors indefinitely and produce an impression of infinity. I intended to view it as a cultural time continuum and a contradiction of the sense of entrapment. While the West is intrigued by the culture of otherness, the Greek temple especially in its colonial applications--can also be viewed as a hegemony of culture over otherness (Buddha). Therefore, the discourse of entrapment is a paradox between cultural hegemony and cultural appreciation.

The world today has adopted the Western mode of education due to various after effects of colonialism which, in a sense, guaranteed its efficacy. The traditional scholarships of

138

the European others was destroyed or was no longer able to maintain its integrity after the Second World War; and even monastic traditions, pre-eminently Buddhist, are endangered, for the favored view of Buddhism is individualist rather than austerely institutional and textual. Westernization thus became a way of life. The construction of the colonial order is related to the elaboration of modern forms of representation and knowledge[5]. It has penetrated almost every level of our contemporary life. However, it is trivial to regard Westernisation at the level of material conversion of daily necessities. My upbringing as an artist was an example of pan-Westernization in Asia. The traditional art of Asia is now categorized under the heading of 'antiques'. Its significance is only confined within the locality of Asia and a particular population that has the capacity to appreciate it with its traditional value intact. These local groups are perhaps the only safe haven for the traditional form of Asian art to exist without the scrutiny of Modernism. Once a non-European art form is dislocated, it has almost no market value in most Eurocentric nations (except in antique shops perhaps). However, there are curious exceptions such as aboriginal art which in its indigenous life is perhaps not appreciated as fine art it thrives in the Western art markets due to its apparently inalienably authentic nature, which nevertheless seems to be able to evolve and grow with Western formats, art materials and distribution and communication networks.

Westernisation is conceivably the solution for the European others to communicate and to be accepted within the realm of Western art. It is also vital for marketing purposes. The popularity of Western art in Asia also signifies an historical phenomenon. It was due to

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[5] Mitchell, T. *Orientalism and the Exhibitionary Order,* form Mirzoeff, N. The visual culture reader, Routledge, London, 1999, p 293.

139

the effects of colonization that people perhaps lost their own cultural confidence because of being defeated by the Europeans. Hence, traditional art forms of the Old World resemble a backward and decayed past. A Buddhist figure in this line of thought might suggest the perception of otherness that has been institutionalized and fabricated through the power of the West.

The motif that is inserted in the pediment, is a personal impression of the artifacts that belonged to the Han dynasty during the Bronze Age of China. The Han Dynasty was one of the proud chapters in China where Confucian philosophy was established. Historians have used Plato as a comparison with Confucius to signify a parallel development between the East and West. A Chinese person who might not be proud of Chinese history during the eighteenth century to the mid twentieth century, surely would be proud of the achievements of the Han Dynasty. The area of land controlled by the Han Empire was the second largest compared to the Tan Dynasty. The surrounding 'barbarian' tribes were either conquered or they agreed to sign a non-aggression pact with the Empire. In the situation of Chinese Diaspora, one's glorious past seems a distant echo that is disassociated with the descendents of the present. Artifacts from China's old empires in Eurocentric museums can always be a reminder of how those objects had been dislocated.

The pediment of a Greek temple is also a signifier of the dedication and the function of the building. Here in this work, it implies a constructed 'Oriental' institution that can be a contradictory illustration of the self. Early in this body of text, Buddha was first assumed as an insertion of the self, because its cultural categorisation is obviously Asian. However,

with all the Western influences and personal appreciation of classic cultures, the temple can also be perceived as another sense of the self. It was according to this Western upbringing I experienced as an artist that triggered this analogous prediction of self-representation. Hence, the motive and the Buddha have become a secondary cultural construct. The notion of entrapment might not be based on confinement but it embraces a neglected cultural identity and belonging.

The depiction of the Greek temple involves two distinct intentions. Ancient Greece once had a glorious past. Its culture and philosophy are now embedded in the Western consciousness. Its celebration of human nature and the human physique had dominated many parts of Western art history. I, too am an admirer of this tradition of antiquity. It has inspired me into the realm of art when Modernism was the dominant movement of the world art. I am more familiar with the history of Western art than the history of Chinese art, because when surrounded by Chinese cultural tradition and living in a Chinese dominated environment, I have taken it for granted. Chinese cultural scholarship has a long tradition that is often accompanied with a large array of institutions, agencies and authorities to guard cultural interest and maintain cultural integrity. It is a tradition that must be Chinacentric and does not allow for contamination. The continuation of this tradition has been passed down through the system of apprenticeship. The linear and continuous development is analogous to the Western tradition of painting up to the pre-modern era. This is why many Western art historians seem to dismiss Chinese painting due to its lack of radical change. I too, once sided with the West and dismissed the value

of Chinese painting. But being in the situation of dislocation, I have begun to appreciate its value.

In this context, the Greek temple façade can be considered as a representation of Western authoritarian institutions. It also locates one's personal emergence as an artist in the context of a strong and infectious Western influence. The Asiatic content has become secondary and may be repudiated psychologically. The charismatic influence of Western culture has even sparked an inward critique of Chinese culture. Bo Yang, a Taiwan based writer published a book *The Ugly Chinaman* during the 1980s. This was the first of its kind in modern Chinese history. He launched attacks on Chinese culture with what he refers to as 'soy paste vat culture'.[6] Soy paste is a metaphor of his perception of Chinese culture. He mentioned that 'soy paste remains in the vat untouched and unstirred, and because the water content is constantly evaporating, the paste grows thicker and thicker as time goes by'.[7] Chinese culture in his critique is like soy paste trapped in its own incarnations of cultural traditions, unable to change and unable to go forward. He also attacks almost every aspect of the Chinese way of life that can easily be seen as a human condition. He refers to Chinese people as filthy, noisy, crowded, dirty and chaotic. This resentment of Chineseness perhaps germinated during the 1960s when Bo was jailed for political reasons. He has a tendency to publish politically antagonistic text that was forbidden during the anti-Communist era. After he saw a fully modernized America and Europe, he began to make comparisons with China, its peripherals and the way Chinese

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[6] Bo, Y., *The Ugly Chinaman*, Allen & Unwin, NSW, 1991, p xv.
[7] Ibid. p 40.

who are still living in its postwar struggles. His view was in many ways Western in origin. He used many negative Western sentiments as the basis of his attacks. He represents an attitude that dismisses the tradition of Chinese culture and a total acceptance of everything Western.

This line of self-critique was perhaps shared by many Chinese people who experienced dislocation in the West. However, their point of departure was perhaps a matter of self dissociation with the grotesque Chineseness of an Orientalist construction. I in many ways resent this blindness of self-Westernisation and the total denial of who Chinese people really are and were.

The art object is a perceptible entity that has many layers of meaning. An explanation of the aesthetic agency of art sometimes seems associated with the discipline of metaphysics. Nevertheless, within this research I have provided a set of explanations according to artistic intent but not to suggest a closure of its connotations. I hope that it is not just a cliché of East and West discourse. *Entrapment* does in many ways suggests a clear and common discourse of East and West cultural exchange. This is because there are distinct cultural elements from both sides but with uneven proportions. Although it is proportioned unevenly, there are clear cultural elements from both sides. The work is a personalized reflection of Chinese Diaspora. The approach of self-insertion is subtle but not without feeling.

The artwork is made with the intention to express a paradox and a contradiction of identity and cultural ownership. The paradox lies within the argument of Westernisation and position of self. Westernisation of the scholarship of art and culture has posed a larger problem when one's position is to defy the tradition of Orientalist perception. We rely largely on a knowledge of 'otherness' built upon 'our' colonial past. Diaspora is a situation of being in between home and dislocation. The sense of entrapment is 'I', experiencing the life of Diaspora and a paradox of identity. Art is an outlet but not a solution of Diaspora as a social-cultural conundrum.

The 'Buddha' is perhaps like the Greek gods that were once in the cella of the temple, manifesting its mighty powers in the devout human imagination. It is ironic that the Buddha in this sculpture does not have the precedence of the original occupants. The Buddha's hand holding a miniature Greek temple might suggest an endless cycle of 'power' as it relates to the construct of knowledge. Whoever holds the power has the will to the knowledge of otherness. But this heroism is in turn reliant on having something authoritative belonging to someone else to hold.

Ripple
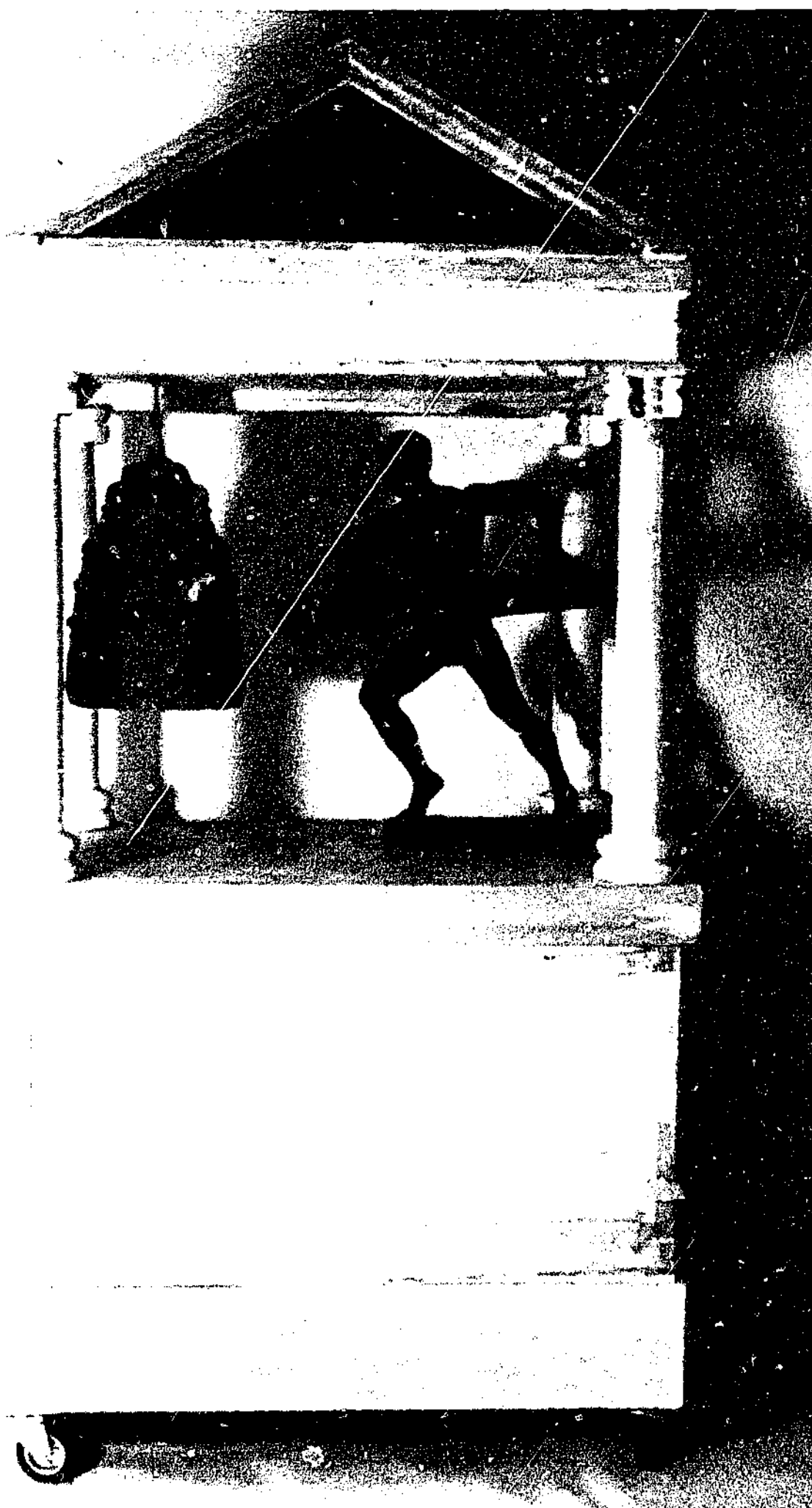
49.
Ripple
Bronze, fiberglass and assorted timber
258 x 76 x 124cm
2003

Within the visual inquiry of this research, I have been engaged in the rhetoric of representation and interpretation of self in the situation of Diaspora. The image of the bell in the context of the 'old' Orient has many spiritual connotations in the eyes of Europeans. The bell and sound that echoed by striking it with an object are often associated with Buddhism and Zen rituals. The bell symbolizes a passive tranquility of the quiet East. Whereas, bells that are used in the churches of Western civilization are mostly related to an active gesture, which is the ringing of the bell as a sound of triumph

- as in the phrase "bells and timbrels" - and more usually as a command or summons to heaven (as in church bell) and a celebratory act of happiness (as for wedding bells) or sometimes death (as with the tenor bell for funerals) which also has great gravity and authority.

The Bronze Age of China as mentioned in the previous chapter, was an active, lively, and warring dynasty. I use a Chinese Bronze age bell in this work, in the knowledge that it has many contradictory associations when viewed from positions of East and West. It represents a moment of glory in time. In this sculpture, the bell hanging under the ceiling of a Greek temple echoes a condition of displacement and dislocation.

During the Chao Dynasty of China (248-207 BC), many bronze-based bell instruments were produced. Bells in early China, according to an ancient text, were mainly used as a musical component with other instruments[1]. The bell was a luxurious object that could only be produced by the Emperor due to his financial power and human resources. Therefore, the function of the bell in early Chinese history was for mostly musical purposes and for imperial pleasure. William Westcott has mentioned, 'Chinese antiquity was successful in controlling the pitch of bells as well as sets of stone slabs, and both were used to produce music. Inevitably, these appealing sounds became integrated into the rituals of worship'.[2] As casting technology became readily available and the endorsement of Buddhism by later rulers of China emerged, the image of the bell had gradually become a spiritual symbol.

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[1] Auang, S. *The beauty of Origins*, Tong Ta publishing, Taipei, 1988, p 88-92.
[2] Westcott, W. '*Bells of the Early Christian Era*' from 'Bells and their Music' www.msu.edu/carillon/batmbook/index.htm 5th Oct 2001 11pm.p 2.

The image of the bell is an apparently universal symbol for spirituality throughout both the Eastern and Western world. It is widely used in religious settings such as bell towers of Buddhist temples or church towers (*campanili*) of Christianity. Hence, the bell in this setting represents a common association with religion and an embodying sense of parish, as witnessed in the Italian term for local community spirit (*campanilismo*). The perception of otherness, especially the unknown, has been mostly regarded as spiritual. The early encounters of Oriental people by Europeans in the early eighteenth century, described the Chinese, Japanese and Muslims as people of worship and holiness. People of today's Asia often perceive people of the West in a similar way when there is only superficial contact or no real understanding of the West's history and culture. Even after colonization, the perception of otherness without personal contact still resulted in a constructed spirituality. The Orientalist practice of Asian religion during the 1970s seems to have provided the Western world with an escape from the stress of capitalism. At the same time much of the East was busy of adopting capitalism as a way boosting their economy and scientific development.

Yen Nakamura states that the generalizations made over the cultures of the East and West are perceived differently. Eastern cultures were perceived by the Europeans as passive, spiritual, calm, unscientific and chaotic. Conversely, contemporary Western culture has been perceived by the 'Orientals' as clear, logical, scientific and orderly.[3] Being spiritual also means being passive and passiveness, combined with colonial propaganda, contributed to the perception of the East being unscientific and unconstructive or not progressive.

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[3] Nakamura, Y. *Conception of the East*, Sue Sang Publishing, Taipei, 1990, p 8.

The sound of bells was a warning signal in early periods of human development when villages were integral to the way of life. They alerted the villagers to certain danger, whether it was an incoming storm or an enemy invasion. Bells were related to unpleasant events. Therefore, the sound produced from the bell represents a sense of being alert and attentive. As a musical instrument, it had been used by many cultures due to its echoing effect. In applying it to a visual artwork, I indended to focus on its perceptual properties. After all, the bell is a cultural object that accompanies the history embedded in our memories. Westcott has expressed the usage of the bell by stating that, 'the ringing voices of bells have comforted man in time of despair, warned him of impending danger, and accompanied him in battle, in revelry and in worship.'[4]

The structure of a bell can be perceived, due to its shell-like construction, as a metaphor consistent with the notion of our corporal existence. A living being is not just a sum of its physical components. Without a life force and a consciousness, the human body is just an empty shell. The bell is an object that can be dormant and silent but with an impact of an object propelled by an energetic force, it can come to 'life' and produce amazing and alarming sounds. Hence instrumentally, a passive object requires an active force to manifest its ability.

As in the much parodied image of the sound of one hand clapping, the bell is a passive object that, without an outside force, cannot produce sound by itself. Here I am employing it as representation of a silent echo of the self, distant from the noise of cultural background. Though a symbol of community inside the *campanile*, the bell on

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[4] Westcott, W. *'Bells of the Early Christian Era'* from 'Bells and their Music'
www.msu.edu/carillon/batmbook/index.htm 5th Oct 2001 11pm, p 2.

its own echoes with a sense of loneliness in a diasporic condition. It is an alien object suspended inside a building with the stigma of a history that adhered to its physical appearance.

50.
Detail of bronze bell in *Ripple*.

Regardless of its image, the bell has many universal cultural functions. The bell in this sculpture bears the insignia of the Chinese bronze age. Perhaps such bronze age graphics have many similarities when compared with other cultures but the imprints on this particular shape of the bronze bell, are evidently Chinese. The work *Ripple* deals with the resemblance and representation upon representations. The bell is a representation of the 'Orient' by virtue of Chinese ornamentation appearing on its surface. It is not necessarily a Buddhist allegory, but to an extent a reference to its perceptual property as passive and spiritual. But perhaps like the institution of the temple - with its grand trabeated form linking East and West in an apparent coincidence of holy artifacts - the bell appeals to certain archaic motifs that somehow unite the two cultures, even though there is no apparent influence between them. *Ripple* was also constructed like a mobile shop with wheels, because Diaspora is partially dealing with the mobility of culture and the movements of self. It is a sense of self, constructed on a

detachable and modular base.

The phenomenon in terms of visual representation can contribute to the trading of cultural objects. Objects from the old Orient have been and are still a commodity of the West (as in the East and *vice versa*). The cultural theorist B Ruth mentioned that there was a coexistence for trading art and artifact in Western markets that contributed to the rapid growth of tourism during the Victorian era. The interactive process between maker and market demands intensified during these years, resulting greatly in increased replications of traditional objects and in the production of many innovative hybrid art forms.[5] Thus, visual representations of culture have been rooted in the consumption of exotic objects. Artists consciously operating with the theme of Diaspora inevitably carry the burden of colonial perception.

Diasporic culture is a modular culture. Modular in this context means a cultural component that can be detached and assembled at one's will. It can be dissected under the knowledge system of the West because when one is in the situation of dislocation, one needs to adapt and to assimilate to be able to survive. A diasporic artist needs to carry cultural baggage to remain exotic, even when he or she is entirely Eurocentric. However, under the realm of European influence, a 'pure' exotic object cannot be appreciated as fine art unless it is compatible with the taste of the West. Take Aboriginal dot paintings as an example. They have been an economic success in Western art markets in some part because they are compatible with Modernism. People who collect them might not be very knowledgeable or passionate about Aboriginal culture but can

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[5] Ruth, B. and Christopher, B. '*Art Authenticity and the Baggage of Cultural Encounter*' in *Unpacking Culture* University of California Press, London, 1999,p 9.

150

at least appreciate it by using modernist aesthetics. In contrast, the traditional Chinese ink painting virtually has no market in the Western contemporary scene (as opposed to antiques), not because no one has the capacity to appreciate it, but due to the lack of relevance with European history and modernity. Also, historians of the West have held traditional paintings—other than the spectacular success of Australian indigenous art—in low esteem. Thus, to become successful in a Western art market involves a degree of assimilation into the realm of European culture, which implies an unequal stance. As a result, Diasporic art falls in the cliché of hybridization or cross-cultural discourse.
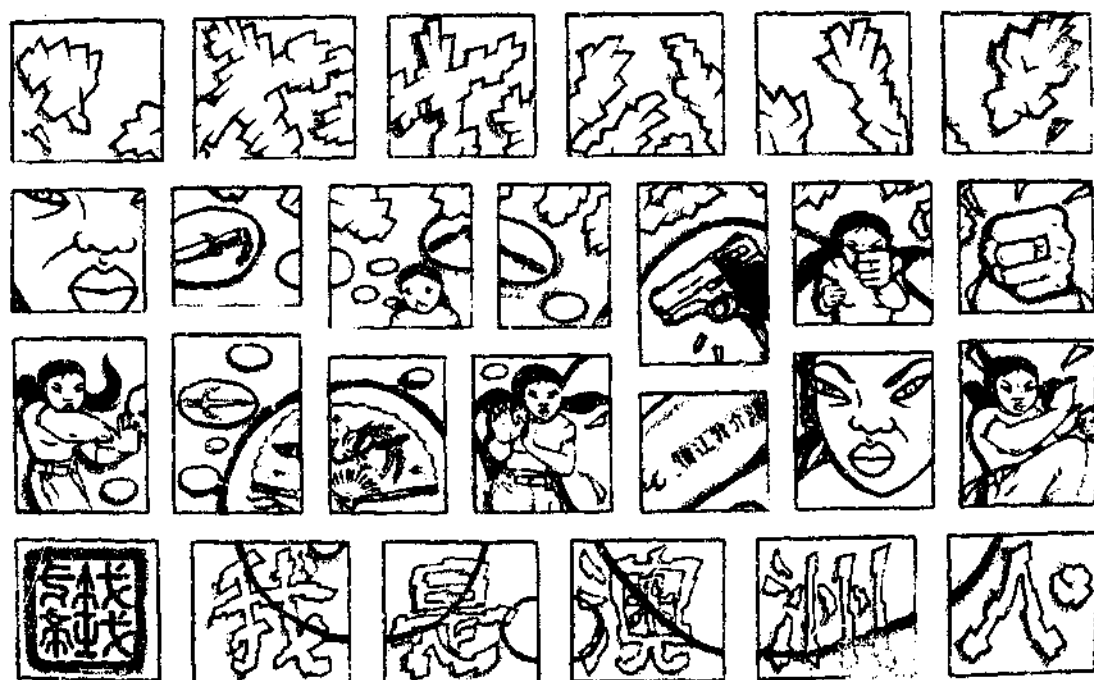
51.
Beynon Kate, *Intrinsic Defense*, 1998 (detail), spray enamel and ink on paper, 26 panels, 2.8 x3.8 cm
P60
From Acret, S (ed.) Art Asia Pacific Issue 29 2001 AHRF

Hybridization therefore becomes a way to make an incompatible exotic object into a compatible one as far as the West is concerned. There is one major obstacle, namely that hybrid also means being in a state of impurity, preferably relishing it and celebrating the loss of a former purity, having presumably shed a presumed conceit of cultural insularity. In this somewhat invidious position, the artist will always be perhaps perceived as a lower cultural product as the result of colonization.

Kate Beynon is one such artist in Diaspora. Her approach to art is ironically occidental. Ever since the age of four, she had been traveling with her parents mostly in European

countries and later residing in Australia.[6] Despite the fact that she does not understand Chinese script, her genetic makeup has perhaps authorized her to use linguistic characters that are as unfamiliar to her as they would to an European. Stuart Koop has interpreted,

> Beynon's work – like the work of many other artists addressing language by using cultural difference – is based on illegibility and incomprehension. It honors these aspects of new language acquisition as a kind of cipher for the alienated migrant experience, which characterizes a new world order of fluid cultures and populations.[7]

Her work has been well received within Australian galleries, and this could have contributed to her stance as a pan-Western hybrid that is compatible with the cultural setting of society. Beynon has undoubtedly experienced a double identity because of her upbringings. Perhaps deep down she feels more like a European than a Chinese, but the tidal force of the Western perception has forced her induced her to exploit' her not-so-relevant identity into her art. Chineseness for her might be a culture by default whether she likes it or not. Beynon has a relevance to the work *Ripple* because when it comes to the discourse of 'West and the rest' the cultural divide can be genetic. This genetical appearance is also historical and culturally bound. A Chinese as a European exotic is like a cultural sphere granting the survival for Diasporic artistes. Beynon has risen outside of such a sphere and for her to return to it might suggest the world is divided by the sense of us and them. Such a sphere as the sculpture *Ripple* represents exists inside a 'Western' authority not limited by geographical location. Clinging onto a

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[6] Koop, S. '*Warrior Girl*' form Art Asia Pacific Issue 29, 2001, AHRF p 56-61.
[7] Ibid. p160.

double identity could be a lonely void. Beynon is an example of how cultural perception can have an impact on Diasporic artists. Her default identity that accompanies her Europeanness, serves as a bribe to allow Chineseness to become an accessible art form. Further, her success in the Australian art market also reflects the expectations of the Australian public. The Australian curator Melissa Chiu quotes Alice Yang (Asian/American art critic) to the effect that Beynon performs a special operation – a kind of ethnographic work in which the contemporary artist becomes an artifact of difference[8]. As one can imagine by her name alone, Beynon could be a very Westernized person. One indicator is language, for English appears to be this artist's mother tongue. Even though her identity is 'inescapably Chinese by descent, she can sometimes become Chinese by consent'[9]. Here one finds the usefulness of Chineseness in a Diasporic situation.[10] The work of art in the situation of Diaspora also operates in the system of 'resemblance', because human knowledge relies on the familiar. When encountering the unfamiliar, the construction of the identity of the unknown is based on whatever is available in the inventory of existing human knowledge. As Michel Foucault states:

Up to the end of the sixteenth-century, resemblance played a constructive role in the knowledge of Western culture. It was resemblance that largely guided exegesis and the interpretation of texts; it was resemblance that organized the play of symbols, made possible knowledge of things visible and invisible, and controlled

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[8] Chiu, M. 'Rough Trade: Curating Cultural Exchange in Australia' from Ang, I (eds.) Alter/Asians, Pluto Press, NSW, 2000, p 138.

[9] Tseen L. K. Who are We Talking About? Asian-Australian Woman Writers.. Hecate, 1996, Vol. 22 Issue 3, p 11, 20 p.

[10] Shen, Y. Dragon Seed, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2001, p 120.

the art of representing them[11]

The perception of resemblance is not confined to the time of sixteenth century Europe, but still operates when the knowledge of otherness is required. Consequently, for the construction of the work *Ripple*, I have depended on the notion of resemblance and the knowledge of colonial otherness.
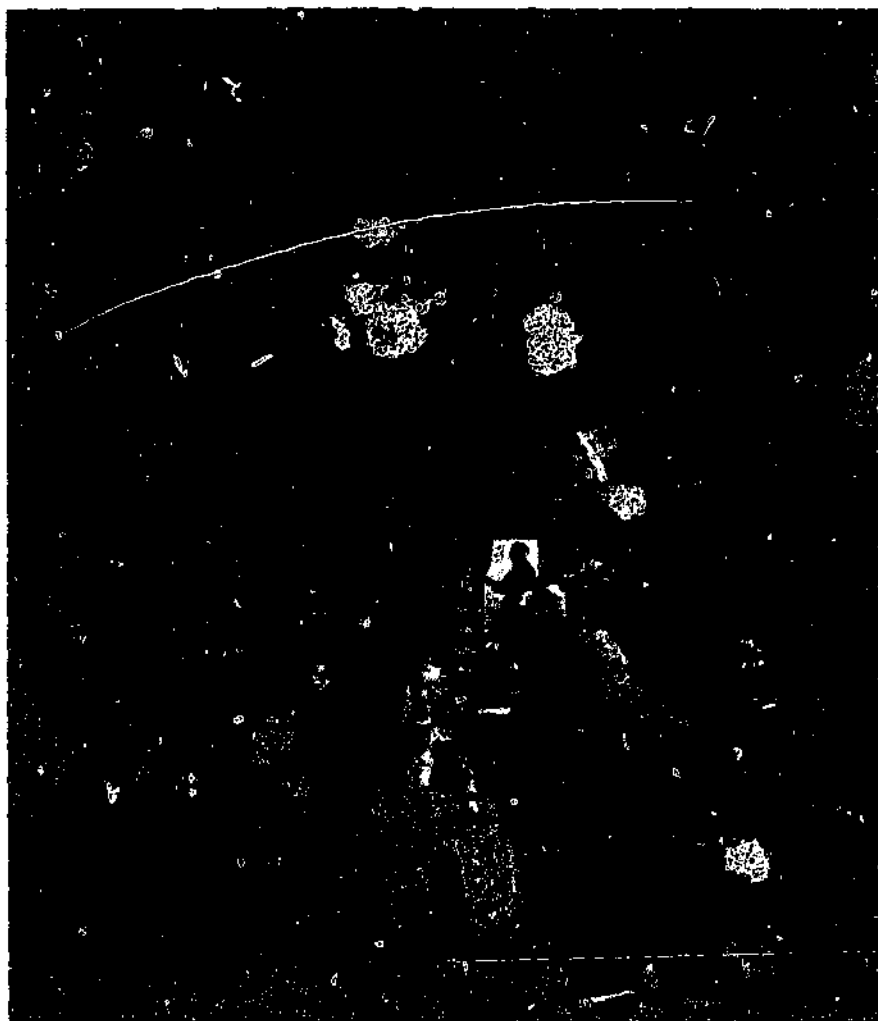
52.
Diego Velazquez.
Las Men inas
1965. Oil on canvas, 10'5 1/4"x 9' 3/4"
Museo Del Prado, Madrid.

From: Fleming, W. *Arts and Ideas*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. London, 1986. p 293.

The artwork *Ripple* was discussed in the beginning of this chapter as a way of expressing self and otherness. Self and the other have a relative and symbiotic relationship. Without the existence of the other, the sense of self is meaningless. The strategy that is employed is compatible with Foucault's analysis of *Las Meninas*[12] where Velasquez ingeniously manipulates the visual representation of self (the artist) the sense of self and the 'hidden' subject matter (King and Queen in the mirror). Within the sculpture *Ripple*, I did not designate a symbol as a representation of the self.

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[11] Foucault, M. *The order of things*, Tavistock publications, London, 1970, p 17.
[12] Ibid. pp 3-16.

A sense of self is once again asserted in the work. It is not at all a figurative representation. As the image of self cannot be defined by an obvious figure, it could be a number of things. An individual at a lesser extent reflects on the sum of one or many particular human conventions. In contrast, a culture covers a multitude of individuals in a diverse population. Hence, the work *Ripple* has been 'constructed' with cultural icons such as the ancient Chinese bell and the Ancient Greek temple to represent a state of being. That is a state of in between.

The bell can also be looked upon as representation of solitude-for it evokes the hermitage as much as community and a metaphor for a state of being between the sense of self and the other. Its influence requires a heavy wooden ramrod suspended from chains to cast a rippling sound wave to the surrounding atmosphere. The bell is a historical object that exists in the civilizations, of many worlds. It has mystic and spiritual connotations, if one does not know its practical purpose (e.g. the bell of a tram or fire engine). It is an object, like many others born to be invaded by human contexts and perception.

The Greek temple in the setting of this sculpture is akin to the ornamentation of many European gardens. It is normally dedicated to one particular god or goddess of ancient Greek mythology. The statue that is situated under the 'temple' is often a graceful marble sculpture replicated from antiquity. This appreciation of Greek sculpture is what I perceive, as the European desire for self-manifestation of mythical immortals. As a result, this ornamental 'temple' can conceivably be labeled as a self-identification of a Western kind.

I have placed an Oriental bell under the temple to invoke the contradiction of colonial knowledge and power. Self-insertion is inevitable and visible but I do no intend to pinpoint a direct representation. Therefore, the representation of self in this work depends on the juxtaposition of cultural representation. It is a self-representation according to the norms of the West.

The bell, as mentioned, is a representation of a tradition of cultural perception. Putting it under a roof, contradicts its origin and purpose. This is a metaphor for the 'banana factor'[13]. There are Western others who have lost their sense of cultural belonging in the West under tremendous racial and cultural scrutiny. In which case, they have chosen to end up assuming and asserting a Western identity. Their realization of being Asiatic is maintained when looking at their own reflection in a mirror. It can be a real shock and disappointment to them as that the core of their sense of self is entirely Western but their physical presence is a contradiction.

The foundation of the temple is a four-sided drawer that I have intended to use as a sign of cultural substance and hidden faculties of human consciousness. It is a filing system of the human knowledge of culture. This cataloging of the knowledge of otherness is needed to be discovered as Bliss Ruth states:

> The solution to defining the authenticity of an object circulating in the networks of world art exchange lies not in the properties of the object itself but in the very process of collecting, which inscribes, at the moment of acquisition, the character

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[13] This is the metaphor widely used in the Chinese community for someone who lived in the Western world for too long and is unwilling to maintain their original cultural integrity. They become like a banana, where they think, act, talk like a white person but are covered with a 'yellow' physical outlook.

and qualities that are associated with the object in both individual and collective memories. In order to interpret such objects we must begin to unpack the baggage of transcultural encounter with which they travel and search for the meanings and memories stored inside.[14]

From this cause, the work *Ripple* belongs to the discourse of Orientalism. The Orient has been the construct of an active Western force which has caused people to export their culture and objects. Hence, the image of the Oriental bell is a stigmatized symbol, because it needs a punishing impact to perform a humane function. The punishing blow has a historical connotation that is inspired by the time when the pride of the 'central kingdom' was shattered by the cannon balls of the West.

The striking of the bell as a form of a punishment is perhaps an underlining property in this work, despite the confusion of other explanations regarding the sculpture. I did not realize it until I revisited the modern history of China a number of times. Chinese civilization has flourished for centuries and survived two major annihilations from the Mongols and the Manchus or even the ruin of communist ideology. It is an old civilization that has yet to give up its potency. The bronze bell itself can be a connotation to a unified Chineseness that has fused (molten) many of its othernesses into a solid mono-identity as mentioned in the chapter concerning *Vault*. The bell with its bronze age markings also illustrates this analogy. The connotation of the rammer and the classical human figure as mentioned earlier in the chapter, is a punishing blow to the bell as well as to the Chinese culture, nation and people. This line of thought is a

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[14] Ruth, B. and Christopher, B. '*Art Authenticity and the Baggage of Cultural Encounter*' in *Unpacking Culture*, University of California Press, London, 2000, p 19.

reflection of how China has been perceived by the West. In Jonathan D. Spence's

writing of Chinese history, he quotes Hegel to the effect that China's fate from the

nineteenth century onward was contributed to by geographical factors. China is situated

in a fertile continental mass that is capable of self-sufficiency. Meanwhile the

Europeans have a positive relation with the sea, because it carries people's ambitions

and the desire of exploration. The sea is a boundary and a limitation of China.

Therefore, China was self quarantined from the development of the world spirit and

world history. The people of Imperial China confined themselves to the filial piety

towards their Emperor and were willing to swallow the labors of slavery. Hugo later

concluded, however, that despite the isolation from 'real history' and the world, the

contents of China will soon be discovered.[15] Spence soon added, "The question of by

whom or how that seeking out was to be done, was left open by Hegel, but the Western

powers, with their ships, their diplomatic missions, and their opium, were rapidly

beginning to provide an answer."[16]

The ornamental pattern on the bronze bell always following the contour of the shape of

the bell, has another significant property. The Chinese Australian Artist, Ah Xian[17] held

an exhibition in 2000 entitled *China China* expressed a similar theme; he mentioned

that the tidal wave of Western cultural influence has disoriented many Chinese and

other non-Western artists to pursue ideas that oppress the continuance of their cultural

origin. He notes that traditional Chinese ink painting has been reduced to the state of

folk art.[18] He has experienced the demise of the Chinese culture at home and overseas.

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[15] Spence, J. D. *The Search for Modern China*, Hutchinson, London, 1990, p 136.
[16] Ibid. p 136.
[17] He was naturalized as an Australian after the 'Tianman Square Massacre' while studying in Australia.
[18] Ah Xian *'Self-exile of the Soul'*, in China China (exhibition cataloge) Australian council of the arts, 2000, p 9.

53.
Ah Xian
Bust 1,2,3,4,10 (from 'China. China' series)
1998
Porcelain body-casts with hand painted
underglaze decoration
30x20x41.5cm ea. (Approx., irreg.)
Collection: The Artist
Form Webb, J (ed.) *Beyond the Future: The third Asia –Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*
Queensland Art Gallery, Queensland, 1999, p 24.

He used a Buddhist passage -'The Sea of bitterness is boundless, turn your head ashore' to conclude his critique of this situation. His text in the exhibition catalogue does not offer much direct explanation of his work but in reading his works I began to grasp its analogy. His sculptural portraits molded from live persons and cast in 'white' porcelain are his way of expressing a situation in the West where the position of the Western entity is not fixed but in many different forms in many different faces. But the bottom line is, the whiteness of the porcelain must be the only cultural substratum and the marking of Chinese ornament can only conform with the contour of the porcelain.

Ah Xian's work has another significance of relevance to *Ripple*. His chosen ornament is proper to vessels, not to people. By inscribing the encoded decorative motif onto the human form, he seems to imply that a historical background inevitably induces its archaic institutionality on the contemporary person. The fusion of ornamental motif and organic flesh involves a strange imprint, a slightly creepy incursion, of the ancient tradition on the sacrosanct individuality of the contemporary (Westernised) person.

On one level, Chinese diasporic art might be about conformity. Many Chinese cultural

minorities have assimilated and conformed to the mainstream to achieve one identity. This has been one of the 'Chinesenesses' criticized by many sinologists. One other profound critique of Chinese culture and history was Hegel's notions of non history, because Chinese history is a dynastic continuum without real abrupt changes and social reforms. Changes that occurred throughout Chinese history were minimal compared with those of European history. Hegel and his followers are using such notions to imply how China lost the technological race with Europe. He also mentioned that in the nineteenth century, China as a nation could no longer support its dynasty and people. It required change but not from within but from a Western source. This line of thought was quite clear, to make the occupation of China legitimate and colonialism justified. With this explanation, the image of rammer and the figure holding may have some poignancy. It represents a sense of cultural critique, an authority of the present and a historical brutal force that changed China. This is at least a suggestive reading of the rammer and the human figure because it accords with an inserted Chinese representation. A conformist Chinese-Western identity confronts the rusty old China of a distant memory?

The recent replication of the bell which is presented as old and rusty, adds to the sense of a renewal and continuity. This artificial replication is perhaps a Diasporic one, because it is physically separated from its original cultural location and cast in a foreign land of a Western kind. But its representation does not alter with such a separation. There is no question of identity because Chineseness is culturally bound and most likely genetic as well. It means that living in a Diasporic state is not an obligatory life of cultural confusion (albeit that confusion comes with upbringings like Beynon's) but living with frustration and the pressure of cultural perception. Diasporic identity is not a

double identity, but on a personal level it is arguable because if one experiences non-Chinese culture first hand, the confusion will be personal. But on a grand scale, Chineseness is tattooed on the distinctive difference of the Chinese. This notion of identity is paradoxically mobile and fixed, because Chineseness is genetic, an appearance by default, irrespective the location of a person.

As if realized by my nemesis, I have been mostly concerned with the modernist and postmodernist approach towards otherness. Thomas McEvielly has launched a critical analysis into the labeling of otherness in the formation of modern human knowledge:

> During the modernist period, Western anthropologists, despite admirable attempts at objectivity, tended to represent the rest of the world through Western conventions, as if the latter were normative, natural or given. Western culture, taking its paradigm from its sciences, was to be the universal self: non-Western culture was to be the interlay other.[19]

Today's conventional knowledge seems to be based on the framework of Western academia originating in the colonial era. The orient will always be the other due to 'unassimilatable differences'. Although postModernism permits—and in some sense celebrates—difference and diversity, it still needs to operate within this invisible frame of Western cultural hegemony. Multiculturalism is the product of a postmodern world where the co-existence of different cultures becomes a prominent way of life.

As an Asian and only being in Australia for a decade, I have experienced the force of

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[19] McEvilley, T. *Art and Otherness* McPherson & Company, New York, 1996, pp 10-11.

racial scrutiny that is a constant reminder of being the other in this society. However, one decade is relatively short compared to a lifetime, it is long enough to develop a governmental belonging to the land. This artistic interrogation of the self and the other is perhaps a silent protest and a way of manifesting a presence in opposition to whatever the sentiment regarding the preservation of Western civilization and way of life. The rhetoric of the self and the other is a prominent force that propels the production of artwork. In this post-colonial era where racial and cultural perception can be used for any political purposes, any rhetoric of otherness will bear the odor of colonial resentment or Orientalist practice. Cultural truth no longer exists but dissolves into representation after re-representation and interpretation after re-interpretation of the other. What will be left might be an ever complex rhetoric that is far removed form the original.

All in all, I hope that this text has clarified the complexities of the sculpture and its representation. The sense of authority over culture is motivated by power. The power is transformable as it is with authority. In a contemporary perspective power is linked with money if not political means. Coincidentally the West comprises most of the wealthiest nations in the world and the rest still struggle with their internal instabilities. Hence, the West has been granted such authority. My sculpture *Ripple,* represents the diasporic condition of the notion of conformity and difference. A paradox that Yiyan Wang expressed precisely:

> Ethnic Aesthetics are ultimately monitored and subjected to the dominant, mainstream aesthetics of Australian Society, whose will and selection of power, reside in its cultural agencies and funding bodies. For the migrant, there is the need

to 'conform' to, and to 'integrate' into, the mainstream; but there is also the demand to retain and to essentialise their difference.[20]

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[20] Wang, Y. 'Settlers and Sojourners: Multicultural Subjectivity of Chinese-Australian Artists', from Ang, I (eds.) *Alter/Asians*, Pluto Press, NSW, 2000, p 120.

China Shop
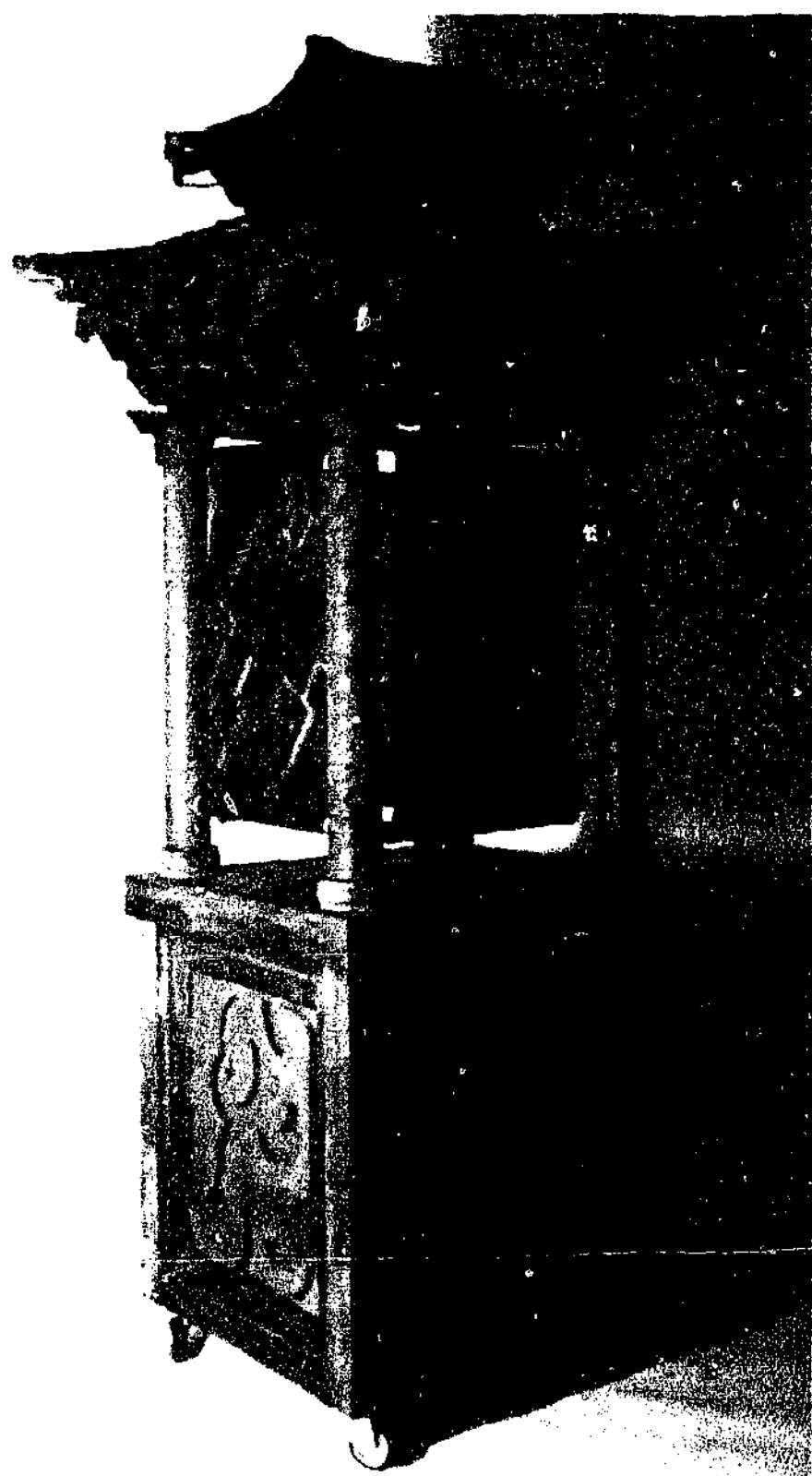
54.
China Shop
Assorted timber and canvas paper.
287 x 104 x 125cm
2003

Chinese Diaspora, for the most part, belongs to the rhetoric of Eastern and Western cultural interactions and conflicts. The beginning of this interaction of culture can be traced back to antiquity. However, its impact on society as a solidified cultural force as well as a historical fact needs to be contrasted against the development of world history between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, during which there were unequal technological developments between Europe and the rest of the world. As a result of their superior technology, keener curiosity about the world and their desire to expand, wars were waged by Europeans against many old, deteriorating and backward-looking empires

such as India, Japan and China. Japan realized its weakness and, after a brief national struggle, it caught up with the state of European technology; whereas China, despite the same realization, failed in its attempt because of its gigantic landmass, population, bureaucratic inertia and cultural baggage. Luckily, China did not shatter as a nation-state from the tyranny of European imperialism but its self-esteem never regained full strength.

What is the relevance of this particular historical narrative in the situation of Chinese Diaspora? Through discussions in previous chapters, the experiences of a diasporic condition have been associated with the effects of colonialism in China, though China was never considered as a colony because it was never fully colonized by any particular European power. Therefore, the demise of the national and cultural-integrity of China should not be solely attributed to European colonialism, but seen as also the product of Chinese cultural arrogance and backwardness during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

There were countless unequal treaties between China and European powers during the height of the period of European imperialism in the nineteenth century. There were also many territorial enclaves occupied by the European powers that imposed racial segregation as well as different laws on Chinese citizens. This situation developed to a point where many Chinese were starting to detach themselves from their cultural designation. I intend to refer to this as the psychological burden of the colonial syndrome.

The infamous May Fourth movement (1917-1927) was one of the extremes in the attempt to Westernise the Chinese way of life. Shu Mei Shih stated:

> The May Fourth advocacy of discontinuity with tradition was conceived in much more radical and totalistic terms in the West, since the necessity for a discourse of discontinuity did not arise so much from internally developed notions of modernity as from the horizontally transplanted modernity of the West, made powerful and convincing by the West's proven superiority.[1]

The movement took place after the Ching Dynasty failed to reform itself in response to the strength of the West. Instead, the conservative force within the Manchu family overpowered the young emperor who was willing to 'learn from the barbarians'. The most decisive event that triggered the May Forth movement was the War between China and Japan. The Chinese fleet was ranked number 8 in the world at the time, whereas Japan was number 12. The defeat of the Chinese by the Japanese was due to the ruling class not fully supporting the modernization of military hardware. Large amounts of military funds had been diverted into building the Empress's garden rather than spending them on the arms race with Japan. This signified that to reform a nation without a coherent understanding of the need to do so, was doomed to failure.[2]

At the time, the May Fourth movement started to invoke bans against the wearing of traditional clothes, the burning of books and abandoning the teaching of Confucian

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[1] Shih, S-M. *The Lure of the Modern*, University of California Press, London, 2001, p 52.
[2] Kuo, T. H. *Modern Chinese History*, San Min Book Shop, Taipei, 1989. pp 141-160.

philosophy by the young elite and the educated middle class. Ultimately, the movement led to a Nationalist revolution and marked the beginning of continuing political and cultural transformation in China. In the field of art, traditional ink painting began to be abandoned by a new generation of artists. Many of them, in the influence of the movement, accepted modernism for the sake of fashion without considering its content and historical background. For them, any aspect of Western culture was superior. This attitude still exists today and its impact has amplified the situation of Chinese Diaspora in Western countries.

Massive social dislocation of the Chinese people within China also occurred because of internal and external pressures. Many Chinese went to Europe, North America and Australia as cheap labor; some went willingly for a better chance in life and financial stability. In these countries, they endured many forms of discrimination. Most of their suffering was suppressed or tolerated because they had invested their hopes in returning to China. Today, many Chinese still migrate and settle in Western nations. This is perhaps due to one major factor: the current communist regime in Mainland China and its unpredictability at handling its internal affairs. Life in China has been considered undignified compared to the condition of Chinese people in Diaspora. People who have lived in the West or have been to the West might think they are superior to those who have never left home, because they have 'baptized' themselves with Western superiority.

The Diasporic experience, at the heart of multiculturalism is the idea that something quite new develops as a result of the transplantation to a new context and the interaction with

167

other groups. It can generate a new hybridized cross-cultural art. This is, incidentally, to be sharply distinguished from superficial examples of cross-cultural work as, for example, in aspects of world or fusion music where there is a plundering of surface characteristics so that ethnicity becomes reduced to a kind fashion accessory which can be pinned to a cultural product and, far from creating something new, manifests an empty formalism and a superficial imprint of the exotic.[3]

Therefore, in this visual interrogation of a diasporic conundrum, an ancient Greek temple façade has been deployed in this research as an image representing the residues of colonialism. It has an 'added-on-identity' similar to its colonial usage in governmental institutions. In the post-colonial era, the Greek temple façade still represents power. We see museums, city halls, libraries, and many government-run institutions, which have been mostly constructed from this ghost image of worldwide colonialism. Therefore, the ancient Greek temple façade is no longer just a Graeco-Roman relic, even though devotion to the classics was an element of the European imperial cultures.

China Shop is a sculpture created to bear these personal feelings derived from a diasporic experience. Whether it has the capacity to contain these contents or not depends on the spectator's experience. Hence, historic narratives are warranted to make sense of the discourse of this particular version of the Chinese Diaspora. The sculpture is once again mounted onto a mobile base as a continuing expression of the mobility of culture. It also represents a condition of the Diaspora – the self as a European other. This can be

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[3] Gunew, S. '*Arts for a Multicultural Australia*' in Gunew, S (eds.) Culture, *Difference and the Arts*, Allen & Unwin Pty Ltd, NSW, 1994, p 7.

perceived as a magnification of Chineseness, which indulged the West with a fascination of the mysteries of China.

The sculpture *China shop* is constructed of timber and red lacquer to mimic the Chinese style of furniture that appears in antique shops. It is a conceptual ruin, reminiscent of the 'old China' discarded by some modern Chinese in the abyss of Chinese history and memory. The mobile base perhaps symbolizes this ever-changing and unstable condition of Diaspora. The modernity of the castors does not flatter the air of an antique commodity, abiding faithfully in a Victorian interior. In its embarrassing unaesthetic functionality, the mobile assembly is also a representation of the nakedness of a self that has been stripped of its colonial pretences revealing its true identity.

The erection of *China shop* poses many questions. One is that of cultural fascination. Studies of China have been funded by Western academic institutions for at least two centuries, although they could be dismissed as 'nothing so much as crazy mirrors in a fun house, but they are the only way that Westerners can see China'.[4] Therefore, to define the sense of a Chinese diasporic identity in regard to cultural authority, I must try to define the place of these Sino studies. Ambalavaner Sivanandn presents a difficulty in defining the position of the self as a European other in the situation of Diaspora.

> To define himself, he must first define the white man. To do so on the white
> man's terms would lead him back to self-denigration, and yet the only tools of

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[4] Lee, K.-Z. *'China Studies: America's Version of Sinology'* in Lee, K.-Z. & Wong, K.-F. *When West Meets East*, Kung Ha, Taipei, 1991, p 87.

169

intellection available to him are white tools - white language, white education, white systems of thought - the very things that alienate him from himself. Whatever tools are natives to him lie beyond his consciousness somewhere, condemned to desuetude by white centuries. But to use white tools to uncover the white man so that he the black may at last find definition requires that the tools themselves are altered in their use. In the process, the whole of white civilization comes into question, black culture is reassessed and the very fabric of bourgeois society threatened.[5]

Sivanandn's analogy has revealed a condition applicable to many situations of people in the Western Diaspora, that is, the condition of identity paradox and the authority of cultural scholarships. In the situation of Diaspora in the West, one's knowledge belongs to the West, regardless of how such knowledge was acquired and maybe distorted as the result of colonialism. This knowledge becomes a tool for success in the West and a contradiction of where one should stand when it comes to the discourse of Orientalism and its reverse criticism.

Early sinological investigations into China were conducted by Western missionaries and diplomatic officials who were willing to study and obtain a profound understanding of China but were not always able to shake off their Western feelings of superiority.[6] Therefore, the early documentation of 'Chinese' knowledge may have contained a certain

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[5] Sivanandan, A. *Alien Gods in* Parekh, B. (ed.) *Colour, Culture and Consciousness*, George Allen and Unwin, Edinburgh, 1974.p107.
[6] Franke, W. *China and the West*, Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1967. p 144.

degree of misunderstanding and misrepresentation. This tradition of Western 'superior' attitude towards the knowledge of China might have continued to the modern era. Many methods and findings are also not always respected by scholars in Taiwan and other parts of Asia. As Lee mentioned,

> Most people in Taiwan have a very poor impression of America's self-styled 'experts' on China: they're 'hired hacks' lobbying the U.S. government to placate the Chinese Communists, they're the chief culprits that instigated the U.S. to turn its back on its old ally the Republic of China, and what's worse: they call themselves 'experts' but they can't even keep their Chinese dynasties straight.[7]

This is perhaps obvious of a self-inserted Western authority on Chinese culture, also containing some degree of prejudice. Conversely, present-day Sinology appears to be different from its predecessor. British Sinologist Glen Dudbridge, has been dedicated to the study of one particular workers Chinese fiction, 'Shih You Ghi' (Journey to the West), and to "study why Chinese society has the kind of literature it does and what its background is, in terms of customs, beliefs, history, and the like".[8] He does not engage in the discourse of comparative literary criticism. Also, Piet van der Loon, a former Professor of Chinese at Oxford, has spent most of his academic life studying local Chinese drama and folk beliefs. This new breed of Sinologists has abandoned a superior Western stance and showed a genuine sense of appreciation and devotion to the culture

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[7] Lee, K-Z. *'China Studies: America's Version of Sinology'* in Lee, K-Z. & Wong, K-F. *When West Meets East*, Kung Ha, Taipei, 1991, p 71.
[8] Ibid p 97.

that they have studied. Their efforts have contributed to the understanding of China through attention to particular sections of culture, if not the grand vision. They have also continued the tradition of a positive fascination towards China. As Jonathan Spence a Sinologist points out:

> One aspect of a country's greatness is surely its capacity to attract and retain the attention of others. This capacity has been evident from the very beginnings of the West's encounter with China; the passing centuries have never managed to obliterate it altogether, even though vagaries of fashion and shifting political stances have at times dulled the sheen. The sharpness of the feelings aroused by China in the West, the reiterated attempts to describe and analyze the country and its people, the apparently unending receptivity of Westerners to news from China, all testify to the levels of fascination the country has generated.[9]

Sinology has many forms and different motivations. As John Clark has argued regarding Said's claim that 'Western philosophers and scholars of the 'Orient' are the unconscious agents of Western imperialism'[10]. What this has signified is that the knowledge of otherness still operates within the discourse of civilizational power for those who wield it for the purpose of authority over otherness without realizing that they are in the midst of it. As Valerie Kennedy has adequately put it: 'Western academic institutions are compromised by their relation to power, especially in departments such as area studies.'[11]

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[9] Spence, J. *The Chan's Great Continent*, The Penguin Press, 1998, p xi.
[10] Clarke, J.J. *Oriental Enlightement, the Encounter Between Asian and Western Thought,* Routledge, London, 199. p 6.
[11] Kennedy, V. *Edward Said*, A Critical Introduction, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2000, p 15.

The Western scholarship of China also means that China is still a fascinating entity attracting the attention of the West. This China is old and very 'different' from the West. Perhaps most importantly China has never completely been under the control of colonialism, plus the time of the communist regime has mostly denied the West's thirst of knowing it until recently. Therefore the mystery still remained in that "the great utility of China was sufficiently far away and looked sufficiently different from the West to serve as a screen on which to project all our fantasies"[12]. These sinologists present a way of self-insertion of the West, because their projection of China and the Orient requires authority. This authority is obtained from self-orientalization and thus allows them to speak on behalf of the Orient. However, these orientalised scholars "assumed some of the exoticism of the orient, which on occasion marginalized them, and even rendered them ideologically suspect at home."[13]

Therefore, *China shop* may not only be standing for or acknowledging the sense of China as old but also the idea that Chinese subjects of the mainland or abroad carry a unique Chinese transcendence. The sculpture perhaps also stands in the position of the West and its insertions. The old tradition that attracts sinologist is the one that Chinese scholars speak sentimentally and proudly of. This tradition was the one that blinded the Chinese nation to how self-inflamed it once was. The old China became an object of desire and felt shame for the modern Chinese in the West. *China Shop* as its name implies is a place open for interpretation and consumption. Who could be the consumers? I believe it would

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[12] Buruma, I. *Two Cheers of Orientalism*, New Republic, 01/04/99-01/11/99, Vol. 221 issue ½, p29, 4p.
[13] Dirlik, A. *Chinese History and the Question of Orientalism*, History & Theory, 1996, Vol. 35 Issue 4, p 96, 23 p.

be for all who were willing to pay the price and for those who were willing to make it accessible to the cultural market or just any market. But what has been the product in demand by the West? It is definite that despite China's massive market in terms of its population whatever the West desires may not be the high rise buildings in Shanghai, or thoroughly modernized cities like Taipei or Singapore that conform to the standards of Western modernism. The same may also be true of the spectacular beauty of celebrated tourist attractions like Hong Kong. Therefore the selling point of *China Shop* is not a modernized or Westernized China, but its old exotic and mysterious qualities that separate Chineseness from the conventions of the West. It is this separation and difference that "fastens itself to the minds of the West"[14]. Hence, *China shop* is a self-representation that indicates much about the impact of time and culture on self-perception and self-representation.[15] The self-accounts of Chinese immigrants in Australia and other parts of the West also demonstrate how any self-representation is performed for an audience.[16] As Yiyan Wang indicates:

> To be a successful migrant, one needs to hold the 'right' cultural capital, such as belonging to the elite of the homeland, and therefore being a legitimate owner of the specific ethnic culture. For a society interested in consuming 'other' cultures, artworks need to be 'cultured' to the taste of the mainstream to have the base to rise to the mainstream.[17]

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[14] Spence, J. *The Chan's Great Continent*, The Penguin Press, London, 1998. p 241.
[15] Shen Y. *Dragon Seed*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2001, p 151
[16] Ibid. p 152.
[17] Wang, Y. *'Settlers and Sojourners'* form Ian A. (eds.) *Alter/Asians*, Pluto press, NSW, 2000, p 121.

China shop is on wheels because it metaphorically conforms to the mobile nature of Chinese Diaspora. It is mobile because it is based on the modernization of the world. Modernization is contrary to what the West desires but a necessity for China in order to ditch its 'old and rusty' past. Modernity is also what people of Chinese Diaspora keep battering themselves with so they can conform with global society and blend in with their Western peers. When it comes to consuming culture, the Western market does not want conformity but diversity and authenticity. Thus, Chinese Diaspora contains a contradiction and many binary situations. It is either us and them, east and West, modern and old, past and present, tradition and change. The West also is contradicting itself on points such as when it comes to nationalism. It wants conformity regardless of the backgrounds of its migrant citizens. The bottom line has been the pledge of loyalty to its allegiance. On the other hand the West wants exoticness for consumption. As Catherine Hall has quoted Bhabha: the projection of the other is always about repressed aspects of the self. Relations between the West and its others are characterized by a deep ambivalence: 'the other' is both an object of desire and derision, of envy and contempt. With the West simultaneously projecting and disavowing difference in a contradictory way, asserting mastery but constantly finding it slipping away.[18] So, *China shop* will remain an echo of the old, rotten and backward China because it is advocated by the West. *China shop* will show that it is purposely built to imitate the seasoning. Its oldness is an artifice. Its shelves will remain empty because it is a space for contemplation of what it means to be an old and backward China and what it means in Diaspora.

[18] Hall, C. *Histories, Empires and the Post-Colonial Moment in Chambers*, Iain and Curti, Lidia, The Post-Colonial Question, Common Skies, Divided Horizons, Routledge, London, 1996, p 70.

Conclusion

This research has been engaged in visualizing Chineseness in social dislocation and in terms of cultural and historical events associated with Orientalism. It does not, however, belong to a finger-pointing discourse. It is rather a response to the Western discourse of Chinese culture which attempts to reconcile personal feeling and political history. There are several perhaps necessarily inconclusive matters concerned with the artworks produced in this research; and, perhaps as with all artworks, their connotations may not be wholly transparent. There is a discourse of Orientalism and Westernization within this framework of artistic analogies, and they probably harbour a desire to reverse the mechanism of Western culturalism. When the West receives such reversed discourse, the response as anticipated is a reactive defense, and it precipitates somewhat invidious cultural comparisons. Such a response seems to imply that while the West has the authority to lunge a discourse on its others, the Western others cannot reciprocate. The question all comes down to the notion of power. Orientalism was first practiced during the time when the Europeans, whose power was uncontested, had occupied most landmasses of the world during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Even though, as history progressed to the twenty first century, the West no longer enjoyed its colonial rule over their former colonies, the West remain the richest nations in the world. Their control is now mostly by means of economy, trade and in rare instances (especially involving Islamic countries) military actions. In a sense, therefore, Orientalist practice as a political motif still belongs to the rich and mighty nations that are predominantly Euro-centric.

As the cultures lose their ancient authenticity by degrees and globalisation proceeds

from so many powerful Asian economies, the notions of the 'West' and 'Westernization' are somewhat contested. As discussed, Orientalism was the product of European expansion and its practice of colonialism or imperialism had a conspicuous and recognizable shape. As a consequence of European expansion, however, the world became Westernised and industrialised. Hence, one might argue that Orientalism belongs to the old world order and has less relevance to the present. This argument might sound valid but it is flawed, because, while Orientalism was first set in motion by the Europeans with their military power and industrial might, it is since maintained by imagery, messages and cultural authority. The physical powers have granted the Europeans a cultural authority over others. This authority also applied to the knowledge of European others.

Said's notion of Orientalism has a profound impact on the discourse and rhetoric of the Orientals as a Western conceptualized creation of self-inserted identity; and here a paradox appears, for many of the literary and musical works Said analyses appear to belong to the Western canon, and most of his writing is done in English. Yet, given Said's personal history, and given the history the twentieth century, it could hardly be otherwise. If Said is to be heard on the world stage, then he must write in English, and if he is to influence work in the academy, he must focus on works that command a wide audience.[1] And of course there is something compelling in the masterpieces of Western music; and no one would want his subject matter to be exclusively Other. The same paradox can easily be applied to the position of this research, because the technique, the expression and conceptual training were transacted in the West to which, in large measure, the artwork addresses itself. This position will become a point of

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[1] Kennedy, V. *Edward Said*, A Critical Introduction, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2000, p 148.

contemplation of Orientalist practice as a process that replaces one's cultural identity with a Western image and a self-asserted authority. The metamorphosis of cultural identity becomes the condition of Chinese diaspora. This authority over culture and knowledge still persists and has assumed a different form that makes Orientalism relevant to the contemporary rhetoric of cultural practice. As other nations have adopted the industry of the West they become just as powerful economically. These nations are: Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Korea, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. As they become newly rich nations in their regions, the notion of the West and the sense of power that is associated with it, becomes fuzzy and not defined. La Decouverte in his book *L'occidentalisation du monde*, translated as *Westernization of the world* has said:

> The West is no longer the West, and the white man is no longer white. Can we really say 'Westerners' when referring to representatives of that new industrial giant, Japan and her thriving imitators in South-East Asia? Media present them to us as technological wizards, conquering ever larger market shares and making the machines work harder and better than their former masters ever could–models to be imitated–while at the same time conjuring up the old colonial phantasm of the Yellow Peril.[2]

The West is no longer solely defined as essentially European in a racial sense. It has become a practice that Decouverte has further characterized, 'I see it as a machine, impersonal, soulless, and nowadays masterless, which has shaken off all human attempts to stop it and now roves the planet.'[3] Decouverte's notion implies the

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[2] La Decouverte *Westernization of the World*, Blackwell Publishers Ltd, Oxford, 1996, p 2.
[3] Ibid. p 3.

predicament of globalisation and its progression when his book was first published. Those rich non-European nations that seem to be contradicting the conventional perception of the West might not be so contradictive at all, because the lifeline of these economically powerful nations is bound with the 'old' West. Their economic power resides with the US market as well as their security. If the US suddenly imposed any trade barriers those nations' industries may well collapse. Walter D. Mignolo in his paper: 'Globalisation, civilization processed, and relocation of languages and cultures', mentioned the dependencies of the second and third world to the 'first world'. He said:

> The third world became a space, geographic as well as epistemological, where 'culture' rather than 'science' was produced. The second world had, indeed, achieved a level of technological and scientific status comparable with the first. However, the discourse of universal scientific and scholarly knowledge was produced in the first, underlying the 'ideological' shortcoming of the second world, which kept them apart from an ideal neutrality of scientific knowledge, tied up with the political ideal of democracy.[4]

The old 'West' might be in the process of decline but its method has been transferred and re-invigorated in a global setting that still dominates the world. There is an exception and an argumentative one, when it comes to identifying the 'face' of the West, which in the position of Japan, has become a rich and powerful nation by means of Westernisation. As Japan became a modern state by Western standards in the nineteenth century, "Americans began to denote the similarities between Japanese and white Americans, more than their differences. They sought to differentiate the Japanese from

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[4] Mignolo, W. *Local Histories/Global Designs*, Princeton University Press, London, 1999, p 226.

other Asians. To mollify fully suspicions that their racial theory was not totally bunk,

some even sought evidence that the Japanese were 'somehow Christian and white.'[5]

Japan is now one of the richest nations, ranking highly among its Western peers. Hence,

in the Japanese consciousness, they tend to deny they are Asians and part of Asia.

Although the Japanese are geographically situated in Asia but not so physiologically, in

the 1930s and 40s, Nazi Germany regarded Japanese as white men of Asia. Moreover,

Nazis also regarded them as their long lost Arian brothers. As Albrecht Furst von Urach,

a Nazi propagandist had said in his paper 'Das Geheimnis japanischer Kraft' (Berlin:

Zentralverlag der NSDAP, 1943) "The Axis Pact that ties us to Japan is not a treaty of

political convenience like so many in the past, made only to reach a political goal. The

Berlin-Rome-Tokyo alliance is a world-wide spiritual program of the young peoples of

the world."[6] This German alliance with Japan was not consistent with the Nazis' racist

ideals because Japanese are 'yellow' rather than 'white'. The Japanese imperial army

did however, with the consent of the Nazis, destroy the British and French empires in

Asia. Hence, the Nazi racial supremacist doctrine 'should be more accurate to describe

them not as white supremacists but as supremacists of a pseudo-race cobbled together

out of ethnic national, linguistic and geographic characteristics.'[7] This racist

propaganda did not cease with the defeat of Axis powers but existed in the collective

memories of human minds, which explains how those racist societies persisted. The

same goes for contemporary thought on Western powers that regard Japan as part of the

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[5] Fields, C. *'Yellow Man's Burden: Ainu Subjugation and the Development of Racist Ideology in Japan'* Washington University in St. Louis, Art & Science, http://www.artsci.wustl.edu/~copeland/ainu.html. Accessed 1st July, 2003.
[6] Von Urach, A. F. *'The Secret of Japan's Strength'* German Propaganda Archive, http://www.calvin.edu/academic/cas/gpa/ww2era.htm. Accessed 4th July, 2003.
[7] Locke, R. *'Rethinking History: Were the Nazis Really Nationalists?'* FrontPageMagazine.com, August 28, 2001. http://www.frontpage.mag.com/Articles/printable.asp? accessed 8th July, 2003.

West, as Professor Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* seems to imply. He has mentioned, that Japan was included as a 'close' ally of the West. Therefore, Japanese Occidentalism cannot really be regarded as a reverse Orientalist practice. At least their method came directly form the West and the West embraced their state of power. Contemporary notions that have intended to exclude Japan from Western entities have receded to racial prejudice, based on physical appearance.

This history of who belongs to the West and who does not, has mostly been based on political and practical reasons. These reasons are generated from the 'old Western thinking' of culture and race. This mentality did not cease at the end of World War Two. Professor Huntington is a prime example of how such ideology continues, because the West desires a powerful ally in a non Western region, serving as an unofficial out post. The same thing applies to Orientalism and its association with colonialism. They also have contemporary parallels. They can be replaced with Globalism and free trade. Globalism allows rich nations (mostly Western nations) to exert their economic power over poor nations. The West became rich in the first place by using taxation and state interventions to protect their infant industries[8] and to copy whatever technologies were available at the time, which is now forbidden by the world trade organisation in the name of free trade and patent laws. Poor nations' infant industries will have to compete with fully-grown Western industries or simply become a supplier of cheap labor and raw materials, causing a negative impact on their environments.

Globalism is a market-driven phenomenon that depends on the consumption of all things including art and culture. Globalisation in terms of cultural practice is consistent

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[8] Monbiot, G. *'Enslaved by Free Trade'*, New Scientist, 31 May 2003, No. 2397, Vol. 178, p 25.

with the notion of Orientalism because it is performed in the rhetoric of radical difference. This means imaging an other as wholly other, exaggerating and aestheticizing the differences that do exist, and placing all firmly in the past.[9] Disney and Hollywood are the two main players in such enterprises. Animated films such as *Mu Lan* and *Pocahontas* are examples that continue the *Madam Butterfly* exoticism that illustrated how the rhetoric of historical others is relevant to Orientalism.

As an artist producing oneself in a settler culture, surrounded by a globalizing market, a condition of internal exile is created, where one is not quite at home at home, because the place is lived in or settled, is only an object of metropolitan fantasy - the desire evident in the ideas and images of the larger market. Settlers first cast the metropolitan gaze upon the periphery, and now seek to escape. Alternatively, exploit it, for themselves. As agents of the gaze, however, settlers are left strapped of resources by decolonisation, shorn like sheep of an identity always dependent on marketing.[10]

Orientalism also has another contemporary reincarnation, which is multiculturalism. The multiculturalism debate can generate a reactive response from both the West and the rest. Within the scope of this research discussion can only take place in terms of China and the West, or Australia in particular. Critically speaking, every nation is a multi-ethnic society. Europe is a big multi-ethnic entity; so is China. The difference is that in China there are only minor differences among the minority groups. When the difference of appearances became identifiable the problem begins to appear. Multiculturalism may operate in the form of Orientalist practice. As long as the

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[9] Root, D. *Cannibal Culture*, Art Appropriation, and the Commodification of difference. WestviewPress, Colorado, 1996, Perface xii.

[10] Turner, S. *'Colonialism continued'* in Docker, J.(eds) Race, Colour and Identity, UNSW Press, Sydney 2000, p 219.

dominant cultural group remains dominant in a governmental and economical state, multiethnic identities are allowed. These subdominant cultural identities aid a sense of empowerment and provide cultural consumption to the Euro-centric audience. In the case of the Chinese (or Asians in general), their financial success has toppled the above mentioned 'social equation' of multiculturalism. In the case of Australia the otherness is supposed to be poor and remain dominated, but the success of Asian migrants attracts 'white' resentment. Hence, Diasporic Chinese (and Asians) have to endure the exclusion and sometimes aggressive actions.

The Chinese in Australia historically represented a 'slave' class to the white settlers. They were imported from China during the nineteenth century to carry out manual labor. As they began to adapt to the local environment and compete with white settlers, they posed a threat to the white supremacy of the time. The Chinese appearance became a curse in Australia and was used as an anchorage for the federation that united the five colonial states. The White Australia policy was imposed to deny citizenship to the Chinese. Today Australia is a multicultural nation. The means of a multicultural society will be endured as long as the Europeanness remains in a supreme condition. However, it is only wishful thinking. People from the non-Western world have begun to penetrate into society and gradually assume and occupy positions that once only belonged to the 'white' club. This phenomenon has sparked an outcry (such as the rise of *one nation party*) of resentment mainly occasioned by the white decline, because it takes a lot for those who believe in the myth of cultural and racial superiority to face a non-European superior with better financial status.

This reaction from a Euro-centric perspective is of cultural relativism. 'What about

China'? And 'What about Japan'. Are they open societies? Westerners cannot be granted citizenship there. The argument is simple, because China is not yet a democratic nation. For China to become a democratic nation, is an eventuality. The West on the other hand, took at least two hundred years of struggle against aristocracy and imperialist rule with a great loss of life and with one of the most profound cases of slavery in human history to reach today's democracy; hence one can not expect China to adopt Western democratic ideals overnight. In doing so, it will have catastrophic consequences. Furthermore, China has one of the world's largest populations and many of its citizens are under the property line. China simply has no capacity to take in new citizens, even so, whether Westerners want to become a Chinese citizen or not is another question entirely. In the case of Japan, the answer is similar, because Japan does not have the space and natural resources to have an immigration policy like Australia. This line of question can be extended to show how the Westerner is treated in China and other parts of Asia. In my own experience and observations, Westerners in Japan, Taiwan and China or its peripheries, are mostly treated with respect rather than hatred, because they represent the wealthy, and 'civilised' West. To have a Western friend seems to be a kind of honor that people show off to their friends.

The above mentioned example is a simple case of cultural comparison that disregards the underling condition of different cultures. It is problematic not because it is reactive but because it stands on the position of the West with the security of it social structure and infrastructures that in essence is a case of self-insertion. La Decouverte has said, 'there can be no true fraternity without real equality, but there can be no equality without identical conditions and equivalent situations. The theoretical solution to the paradox is to declare equivalence to be incommensurable. All people are equal and of

equal worth insofar as they cannot be compared.'[11] The situation between the West and the rest is not identical and many cases can never be. This difference becomes a rift to allow for a biased cultural criticism.

This debate of cultural difference and its comparison signifies that Chinese Diaspora and its artistic extensions mostly operate as a reactive exercise. Diasporic art and its background culture are in a binary existence, which can also be regarded as a symbiotic relationship. The Diasporic art itself relies on the structure of the West to survive and needs some form of conformity to service world consumption. On the other hand, the hosting nation manipulates otherness with a political agenda. The notion of conformity often attracts resentment as a reaction to a general social pressure from the hegemonial West to their others. This results in a passive and reactive defiance for the Diasporic artist (expressed in writing, theatre or art). Very often diasporic art is regarded as the art of Western minorities as Edward Lucie-Smith has point out:

> Minority visual arts, though on the surface often an expression of revolt against contemporary Western society and its social and economic structures are in fact completely dependent on that society. They are in many ways most accurately defined as one of the most visible aspects of the debate that society continues to have with itself.[12]

It was the social pressure that triggered such a reactive response. Lucie-Smith has further analysed the way in which Diasporic art has this dependency on an oppressive

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[11] La Decouverte *Westernisation of the World*, Blackwell Publishers Ltd, Oxford, 1996, p 3.

[12] Lucie-Smith, E. *Race, Sex, and Gender in Contemporary Art*, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, London, 1997, p 207.

society.

> There is one characteristic which all forms of minority expression necessarily share – they are not wholly independent entities, but are defined by the existence of a majority. The dynamism of minority art answers what the majority has to say. It is, in fact, largely shaped by this: all of its statements are ripostes. This effectively means that minority art is shaped by majority pressures, and the same individuals would probably produce very different work if these did not exist.[13]

Such a notion is an invisible frame which undermines the possibility of Diasporic art. It is hard for the artist to break through and be set free from the entanglement of a binary and reactive mentality. The strategy of the production of art in this research cannot escape from this binary expectation of otherness and its spectators. It is apparent that these works maintain a presentation of two different entities - the Diasporic culture and its hosting background. Each work more or less presents the sense of self and the other or the idea of East and West. There are no suggestions in these works that different cultures can always exist in the form of innocent fusion; because 'power' in terms of politics, economic and military, is always at play and spoils the innocence of 'pure' cultural appreciation. This power is often inserted without the connoisseur knowing it, because it becomes in essence, a tradition and an academic canon.

Apart from the evidence of the artworks, the inquiry into a Diasporic condition provides no answers but more questions and problems. Artists and art do not have the

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[13] Lucie-Smith, Edward *Race, Sex, and Gender in Contemporary Art*, Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, London, 1997, p 205.

authority to provide answers to the ailments of our society but can explore the irony surrounding it. The discourse of the East and West can easily become a cliché like a gift shop that exploits differences of cultural objects and its supposed cultural authenticity. This line of debate can yet again refer to Said's Orientalist self insertion. These works also indicate the notion of cultural authority in terms of exotic objects being fragments of culture that are selected to perform certain cultural and political functions. 'Cultural authority is not a question of a conspiracy but of the existence of a context in which decisions about cultural value can be articulated and put into practice.'[14] The practice of Orientalism in the West has been the self-inserted authority to select fragmented exoticness in a designated 'box'[15] in which to contemplate a romantic or aesthetic cultural function. By the same token the postcolonial artist may be seen navigating the void between these seductively posed polarities, sustaining a romance by turning exoticized otherness into social realignments.[16] Thus this research, with its production of artworks, has taken these cultural fragments out of such a box and rearranged them in reverse order.

Said's theory has been an insight into this debate of the perception of otherness in the West. The Orientalism debate exists provided that otherness is an assertive identity manipulated by the dominant cultural group. 'Cultural difference has long been conceived as a redemptive solution to the ambivalence of a Western culture established in the destruction of its won traditions, the appropriation of other aesthetic and spiritual

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[14] Root, D. *Cannibal Culture, Art Appropriation, and the Commodification of difference.* WestviewPress, Colorado, 1996, p 31.
[15] Ibid. p 31.
[16] Kapur, G. *'Globalisation and Culture'*, form Jameson, F. & Miyoshi, M. (eds.) *The Cultures of Globalisation*, Duke University Press, Durham and London. 1998, p 197.

modes is ultimately self-referential.'[17] The reactive action from the subdominant groups are often futile and can be dismissed by the fact that their survivors depended on the social structure of the dominant culture. Western others have been used in many different contexts to the benefit of Western politics. Most of all, otherness serves as a dispensable object. When there is a social crisis, otherness can be utilized as the cause of such a crisis. It is almost a joke now to blame the migrant when the economy is not doing well and satiric opportunities abound to blame them for everything.

Overseas Chineseness in the West proved that while Western others can never be assimilated into the main cultural group, in many cases they serve as dispensable objects sidelined for possible political aggression. Hence, the Chinese diaspora consists of many different feelings but most profoundly the experience of suffering. Chinese Diaspora in terms of cultural perception was examined with the accompaniment of a history that "racial positioning of Asian in the West is its historical persistence."[18] Without this, the contemporary debate of otherness will not have a historical backing. Diasporic experiences are often expressed in literature as a kind of narrative that reflects negative experiences. The history of the Chinese in the West consists of a history of sufferings. Romaucci-Ross has said in terms of ethnic identity:

> One's culture is also the common chalice, in which suffering blood becomes redemptive wine. To some few, identity can be a commitment to masochism, but to most it is simply a necessary stigmatic emblem one must learn to carry without disguise. Each group perhaps thinks that in maintaining itself it has to undergo

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[17] Root, D. *Cannibal Culture, Art Appropriation, and the Commodification of Difference,* estviewPress, Colorado, 1996, Perface xi.

[18] Kim, Claire Jean *The Racial Triangulation of Asian American*, Politics & Society, Mar 99, Vol. 27 Issue 1, p 105, 34 p.

certain forms of unique suffering not experienced by others. It may be reassuring to some and perhaps deflating to others to recognize that consciousness of suffering is not unique to any one group, but is the destiny of our common humanity, whatever our separate cultural origins.[19]

The days of mass 'hard core' exclusionist action against the Chinese in the West have long gone. Today's diasporic experience cannot compare with the harshness of the previous century. The dynamics of the self and the other operate subtly and people wrestle to settle scores under the banner of Multiculturalism.

The architectural aspect of artwork and its conception that refers to the classical tradition belongs to a new interest in the re-speculation of classicism and contemporary phenomena. Since the 1980s, many artists worldwide started to adopt classical elements in their work for their own interests and intentions. However, the speculation of classical architecture in this research does not stand on a stylistic and aesthetic discourse because it is used symbolically and is derived from certain facts of history and its profound physical presence as a geographical land mark.

Classical orders and elements represent a continuum of particular events and political entities in history. This continuum is like a collection of memories that have been attached to this particular set of objects. In the form of a museum, it represents the storage of cultural objects and the memories attached to them. Yet the museum itself is an insignia of a memory that 'acquired' these objects as a collection. As a governmental institution, it represents power and the colonial memory that led to its present state of

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[19] Romanucci-Ross, L. & De Vos, G. A. *Ethnic Identity*, Walnut Creek, London, 1995, p 377.

rule. The objects that are made in this visual inquiry in terms of diaspora bear these memories, not confined to one's own mind, but in many different dependencies from the time these objects were first created. This concept of memories being attached to an object and culture is not a modern invention. It is pre-eminently premodern in the West and has been common practice in traditional Chinese painting. As Foung has articulated,

> Chinese artists stressed the 'correctness' of a great tradition, not to emphasize man-made doctrinal truths, but to reaffirm an order larger than the ways of man. The story of Chinese painting tells of imaginative uses of the past – major episodes of stylistic change and continuity that testify to the leading Chinese painters' infinite resourcefulness, courage, and creativity and their abiding faith in their tradition and in themselves.[20]

For one who has been educated in the same tradition, I have perhaps been unconsciously following such a trend. This strategy serves as a binary opposition to modernism that it endorses and endures cultural recognition and ornamentation instead of cultural sterilization. When such forms of objects are allowed, the contemplation of memory, conceptual and poetic content is enabled. Each memory that is associated with a cultural symbol is unique, like books in a library, awaiting discovery. In terms of Chinese diaspora, its cultural objects that are entangled with its past, along with the homeland, the foreign land and present. This entanglement of space and time is not necessarily shared with the hosting culture, because they rely on their Orientalist knowledge when it comes to conceptualizing their others.

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[20] Fong, W. C. *The Mind*, The Art Museum, Princeton University, New Jersey, 1984, p 2.

Under the grand brand of the 'Chinese' there are other aspects of culture that have unique identifications of their own. The word 'Chinese' is a homogeneous name imposed by a dynastic power as professor Janner has implied, but "overseas Chinese people often find themselves inevitably entangled in China's elevated status as a 'privileged other' to the West, depriving them of an autonomous space to determine their own trajectories for constructing cultural identity."[21] Ironically this homogeneous name has also been adopted by the West to unify Chinese minority culture identities. One profound case would be the West's determination to deny Taiwan independence as a nation. Paradoxically, the West propagates the Chinese incursion of Tibet as a political token for the critique of human-rights violations. Because of this homogeneous perception, whatever the signal that China is broadcasting or is being portrayed by the West is, alas, linked with every overseas Chinese, irrespective of diametrically opposed ideologies between the two Chinese groups. In Diaspora one is often likely to feel whatever perception that the West has imposed on China, but to oneself.

China was considered the center of all beings. A kingdom of the high moral ground, as 'every other country has a tendency to consider itself the center of the world. All people are ethnocentric'[22]. To a Western realm however, the 'Chinese' in Diaspora are still presented as an extension of Chinese history, memory and culture and in the case of China, as one of the passing old kingdoms in the nineteenth century, experienced a cultural disintegration so severe that its subjects suffered a loss of national pride and

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[21] Ang, I. *'Migration of Chineseness'* Journal of the South Pacific Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language studies. http://wwwmcc,murdcch.edu.au/ReadingRoom/litserv/SPAN/ accessed 6th April 2003.
[22] Peyrefitte, A. *The collision of Two Civilizations*, Harvill, London, 1993, p 552.

support. "Cultures create situations that support the definition of the self."[23] Diaspora is an intensified cross-cultural experience and it can be both reductive and enriching for the migrant individual. It is the condition of being here and there at the same time and being the self and the other in the same space.[24]

Throughout the writing of this text, the hybridity of the sculpture created during the research is perhaps more implicit than self-conscious. Hybridity has two meanings: one is so called 'happy hybridity' where there is no sense of tension, conflict or contradiction. The second is the one not perceived as a natural outcome of cultural mixing but as a form of political intervention, interference, crisis.[25] This research has erred to the second meaning, because hybridization of culture unfortunately involves the method of appropriation that in many ways relates to Orientalism and self-assertion. There are rare examples of cultural hybridization without the involvement of tension, conflict and contradiction. However cultural hybridization is a common practice between nations when it comes to a national crisis or a civilizational conflict. Japan's Meiji Westernization and China's modernization in the nineteenth century are the two prime examples of cultural hybridization as the result of a conflict and tension with the West.

Hence the artwork and the text of this research do not present a harmonious fusion of cultural icons but presents them as separate entities juxtaposed against the position of their opposition. For aesthetic resolution it would have been convenient to enfold all positions in a tasteful harmonious visual and symbolic unity, perhaps a handsome

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[23] Bower, B. *My Culture, My self*, Science News, 10/18/97, Vol. 152 Issue 16, p 248, 2 p.
[24] Wang, Y. *'Settlers and Sojourners'* form Ien, A. (eds.) *Alter/Asians* Pluto Press, NSW, 2000, p 122.
[25] Lo, J. *Beyond Happy Hybridity: Performing Asian-Australian Identities* from Ang, I. (eds.) *Alter/Asians*, Pluto Press, NSW, 2000, p 153.

mixture of choice decorative options from both traditions, signifying an ideal synthesis of the two cultures. But for me, as a sculptor trained equally in modernist universalizing practice and the incommensurable traditions of Chinese painting, this tasteful stylistic and iconographic eliding of difference would have been altogether too convenient, falsifying what I feel to be the essentially conflicted nature of the diasporic situation. As an artist, I must wear whatever measure of aesthetic embarrassment arises in the expression of an undignified cultural clash in the name of progress.

As an overseas Chinese person, I have needed to re-negotiate with history. Being a modern Chinese person does not mean that history can be transcended, because in Diaspora one's cultural history justifies one's own identity. Such an identity needs to be re-constructed in Diaspora. Chinese culture continues historically but in the situation of Diaspora it represents an alternative reality with a set of different 'rules' that need to be observed. The rules apply to the perceptual force that has descended from the time of colonialism. It is also a factor that confines Diasporic art to a binary nature. It derives its creation from an outside negative force to trigger a reactive gesture. However, without such a reaction, Diasporic art practice can become self-Orientalist pattern making. On the other hand is not all art either reactive or complacent? All art is constructed as a reaction to its background or its past. Western art in particular operates in a history of reaction and revolt against its past. This is perhaps archetypically true of the dialectical basis of Western art, forever rejecting the conventions of previous stage of development, as evident in the classical progress from blocky *kouroi* and *korai* in ancient Greece to the performaces of Sigrit Landau today. Arguably, Chinese art and history works in the opposite way but was regarded as a non-history. Hence, this binary reaction is the nature of the Diasporic situation. As for Chinese Diaspora, there is not much dialectical

tradition regarding a history of art; therefore, whom do you revolt against? The history that justifies your existence so that you can be an Orientalist victim, or the force that exoticizes, romanticizes, self-asserts and excludes you.

The sculptural works that are documented as the visual research are an analogy of this Diasporic situation and its legion ironies. It is also presenting a personal re-invented vision into object memory. This re-energized interest into cultural history of human-made objects has become a trend in the study of culture and art. John Mack is a prime example: his book *Museum of Mind* was published within the parallel time frame of this research. The several influences of this research has led to an interpretation of cultural practice that is effectively a form of psychological re-organization. The self-assertive nature of Orientalist practice is like a viral infection in consciousness. It could be compared to a virus reproduced by injecting its gene material into a host cell and rearranging the cell's mechanism to produce more viruses. In the process of bursting out, they tear a 'piece' of the host cell's membrane to cover itself and by doing so, the host cell is destroyed. This means as a cultural practice, the process is irreversible; at least it is so in the situation of diaspora and Orientalist practice and, above all, in my experience. Self-assertion becomes a virtue in Diasporic art that it constructs a sense of self in the image of others. I hope that my research expresses the cultural gravity of this predicament in a way that recognizes—but does not succumb to—the pessimism inherent in witnessing the cultural compromise, if not annihilation, that belongs to the study of Chinese cultural history.

List of Illustrations

19. Various of 'carcasses' made for different Greek temple roofs.

20. The making of *Dovetail of Conventions*.

21. Upper structure of R*ipple*.

22. Modeling of R*uin*.

23. Arch made for *Dovetail of Conventions*.

24. Upper structure for *China Shop*.

25. *Dovetail of Conventions*, Fiberglass and assorted timber, 234 x 36 x 132 cm, 2001.

26. Close-up of *Dovetail of Conventions*.

27. *Soil*, Fiberglass and timber, 67 x 124 x 46 cm, 2002.

28. *Ruin*, Fiberglass and timber, 145x 124 x 136 cm, 2001.

29. State Parliement of Victoria, Photo taken in 2000.

30. Art Gallery of New South Wales, Photo take in 2001.

31. Art Gallery of Bendigo, Photo taken in 2002.

32. Presidential Palace in Taipei, Photo taken in 2000.

33. Land Bank in Taipei, Photo taken in 2000.

34. National Natural Museum in Taipei, Photo taken in 2000.

35. A colonial building in the University of Tainan, Photo taken in 2003.

36. National Concert Hall in Taipei, Photo taken in 2000.

37. Close up of sculpture *Ruin*.

38. Reproduction of Uan Min Uan, Made in polyethylene, Photo taken in Taipei 2002.

39. Uan Min Uan at present, The side view of Western House, section of 'Ta Sue Far'.
Souce: Wong, W. Uan Min Uan, Su Sang Publishing, Taipei, 1992, p 43.

40. *Bookshelf*, Fiberglass and Assorted timber, 234 x 63 x 39 cm, 2003.

41. East Indian Company, From Chinese History Museum Visual Reference of the
Chinese Contemporary History, Shang Hai Education Publishing, First volume, 1983,
p20.

42. October 1884 French fleet attacking Chinese navy in Wae Gung from Chinese
History Museum Visual Reference of the Chinese Contemporary History, Shang Hai
Education Publishing, second volume, 1983, p221.

43. East Indian Company's Opium transport, From Chinese History Museum Visual
Reference of the Chinese Contemporary History, Shang Hai Education Publishing,
First volume, 1983, p22.

44. *Vault*, Fiberglass and assorted timber, 245 x 36 x 79 cm, 2003.

45. *Imprint*, Assorted timber with oil paint, 234 x 78 x 34 cm, 2003.

46. *Entrapment*, Assorted timber and fiberglass, 278 x 45 x 87 cm, 2002.

47. Buddha, Burma, 19th century, Copper alloys set with mirror-glass. Length 68 cm
OA 1891.2-25.1 Source: Zwalf, W.(ed.) Buddhism art and faith British Museum
Publications limited, 1985, London, 1985, p 163.

48. Close-up of Buddha and miniature temple.

49. *Ripple*, Bronze, fiberglass and assorted timber, 258 x 76 x 124 cm, 2003.

50. Detail of bronze bell.

51. Beynon Kate, Intrinsic Defense, 1998 (detail), spray enamel and ink on paper, 26 panels, 2.8 x3.8 cm, P60, From Acret, S (ed.) Art Asia Pacific Issue 29 2001 AHRF

52. Diego Velazquez, Las Men inas, 1965. Oil on canvas, 10'5 1/4"x 9' 3/4", Museo Del Prado, Madrid. From: Fleming, W. *Arts and Ideas*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. London, 1986. p 293.

53. Ah Xian, Bust 1,2,3,4,10 (from *China China* series), 1998, Porcelain body-casts with hand painted underglaze decoration, 30x20x41.5cm ea. (Approx., irreg.) Collection: The Artist, Form Webb, J (ed.) Beyond the Future: The third Asia –Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art Queensland Art Gallery, Queensland, 1999. p 24.

54. *China shop*, Assorted timber and canvas paper, 287 x 104 x 125 cm, 2003.

Colour Plates
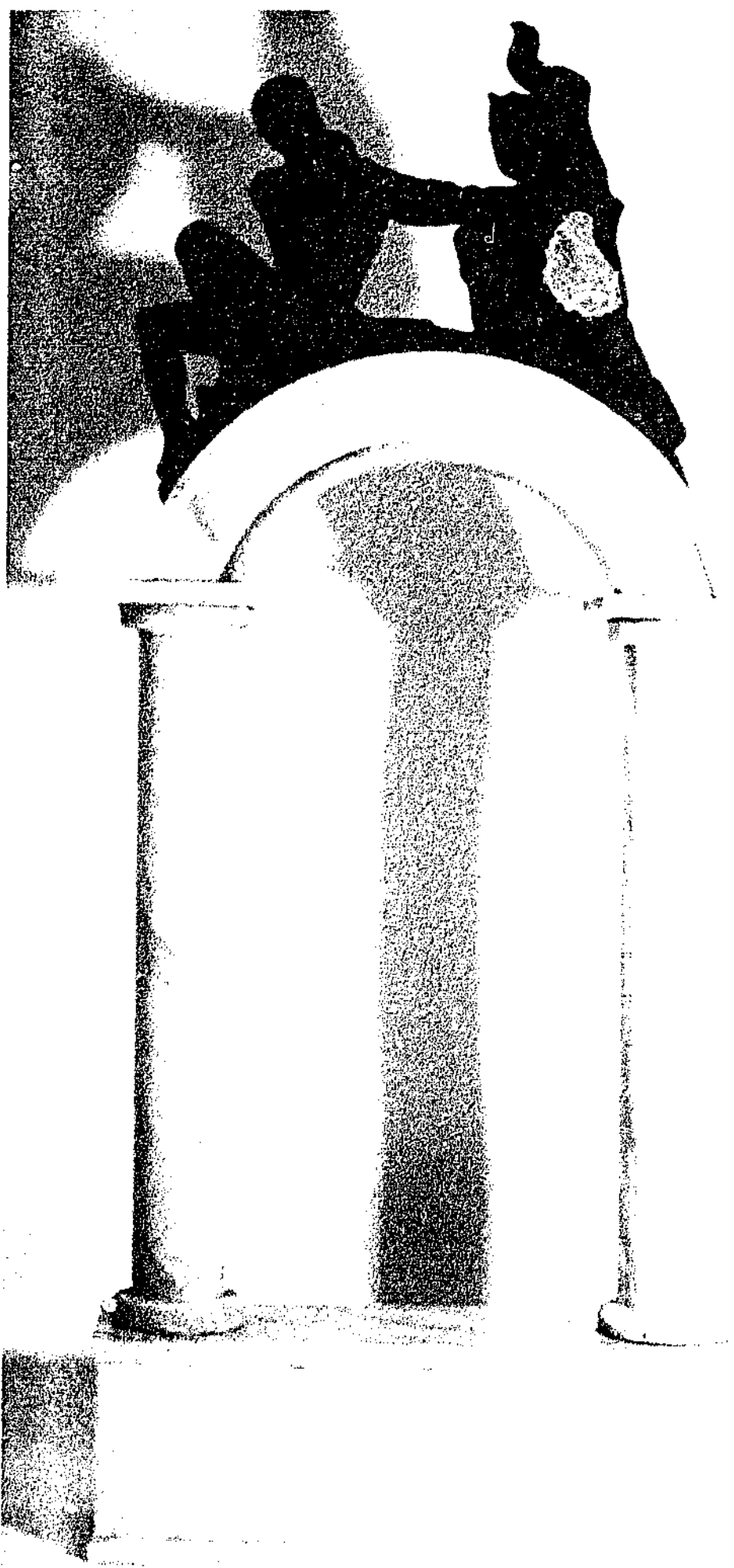
Soil
Fiberglass and Timber
67 x 124 x 46 cm
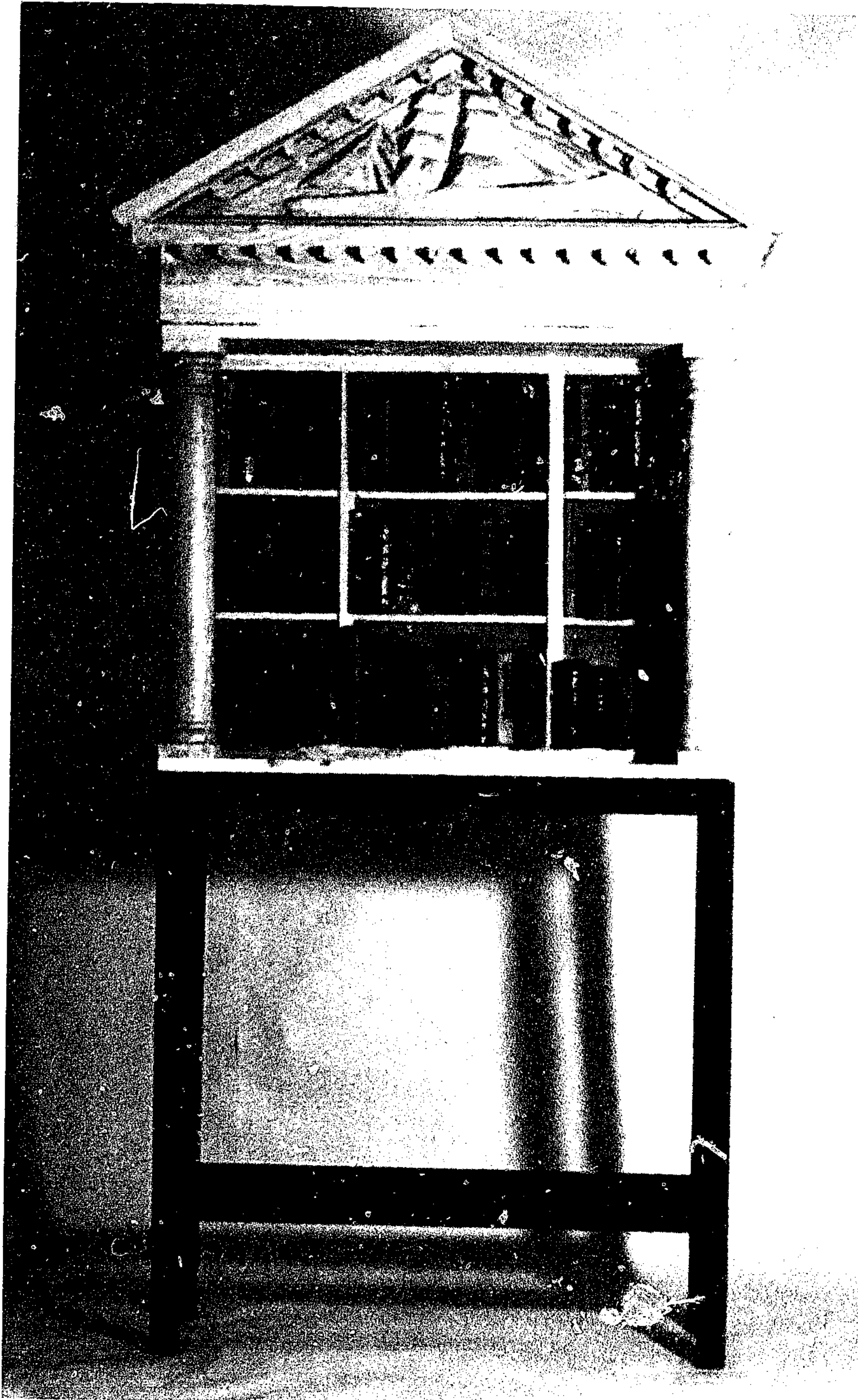2002

Ruin
Fiberglass and Timber
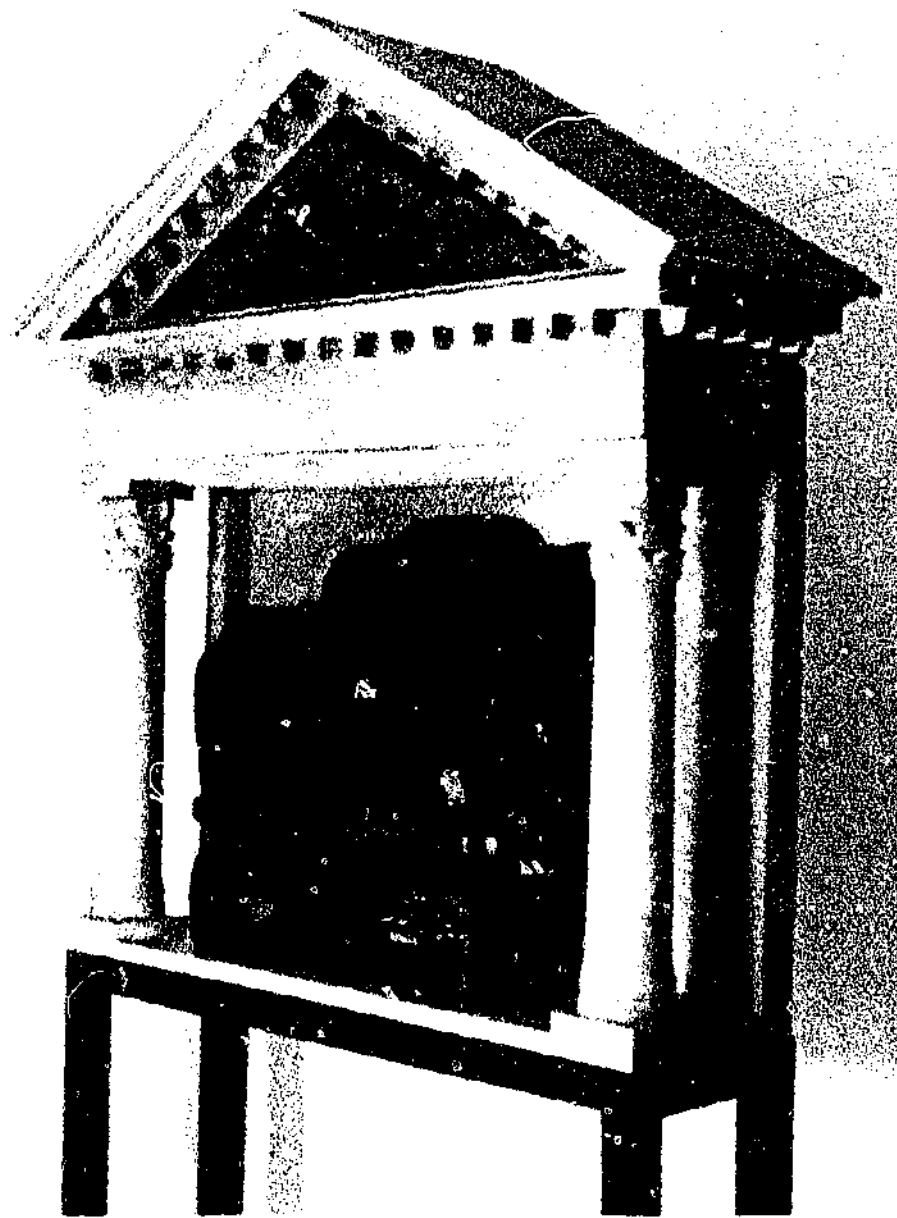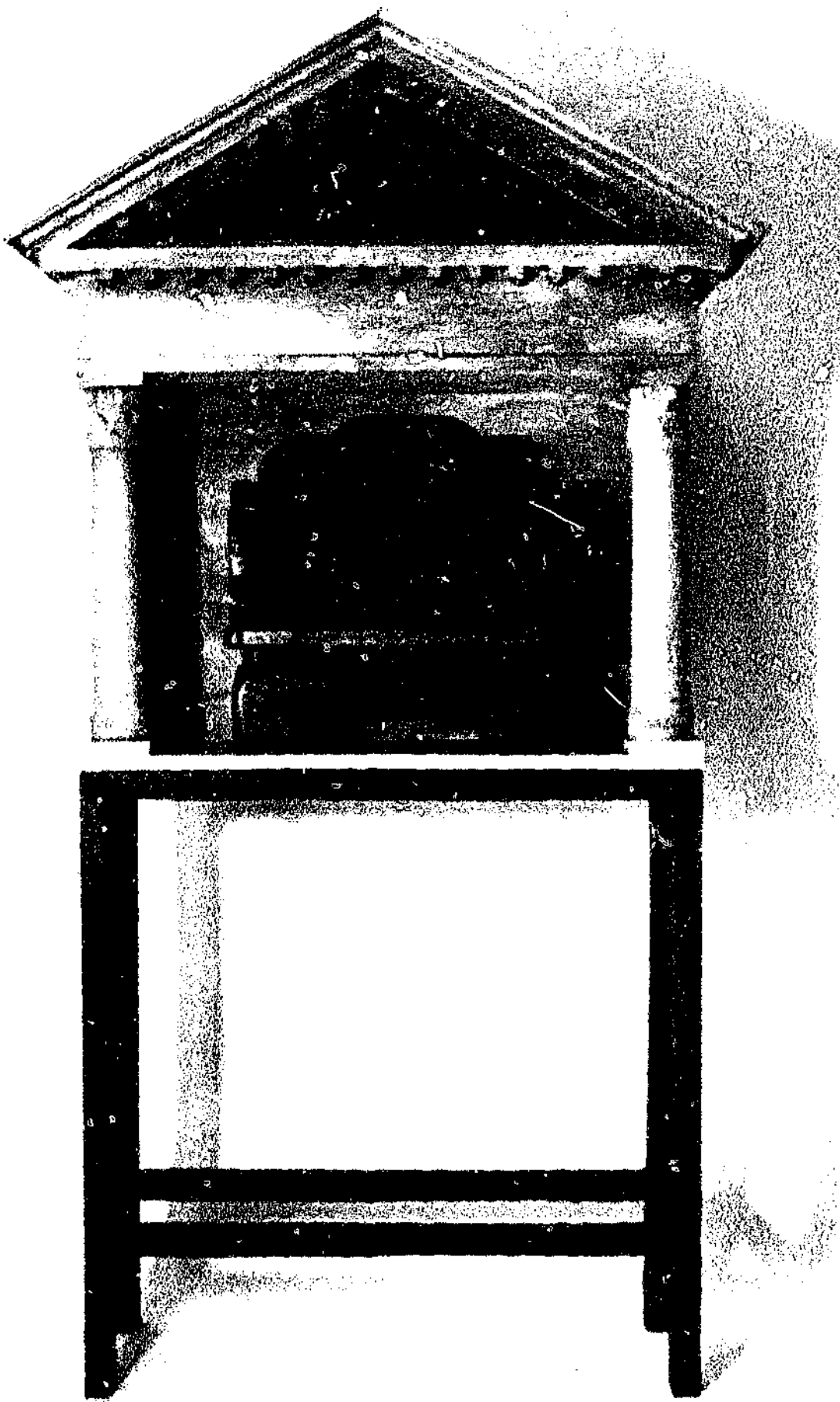145 x 124 x 136 cm
2001

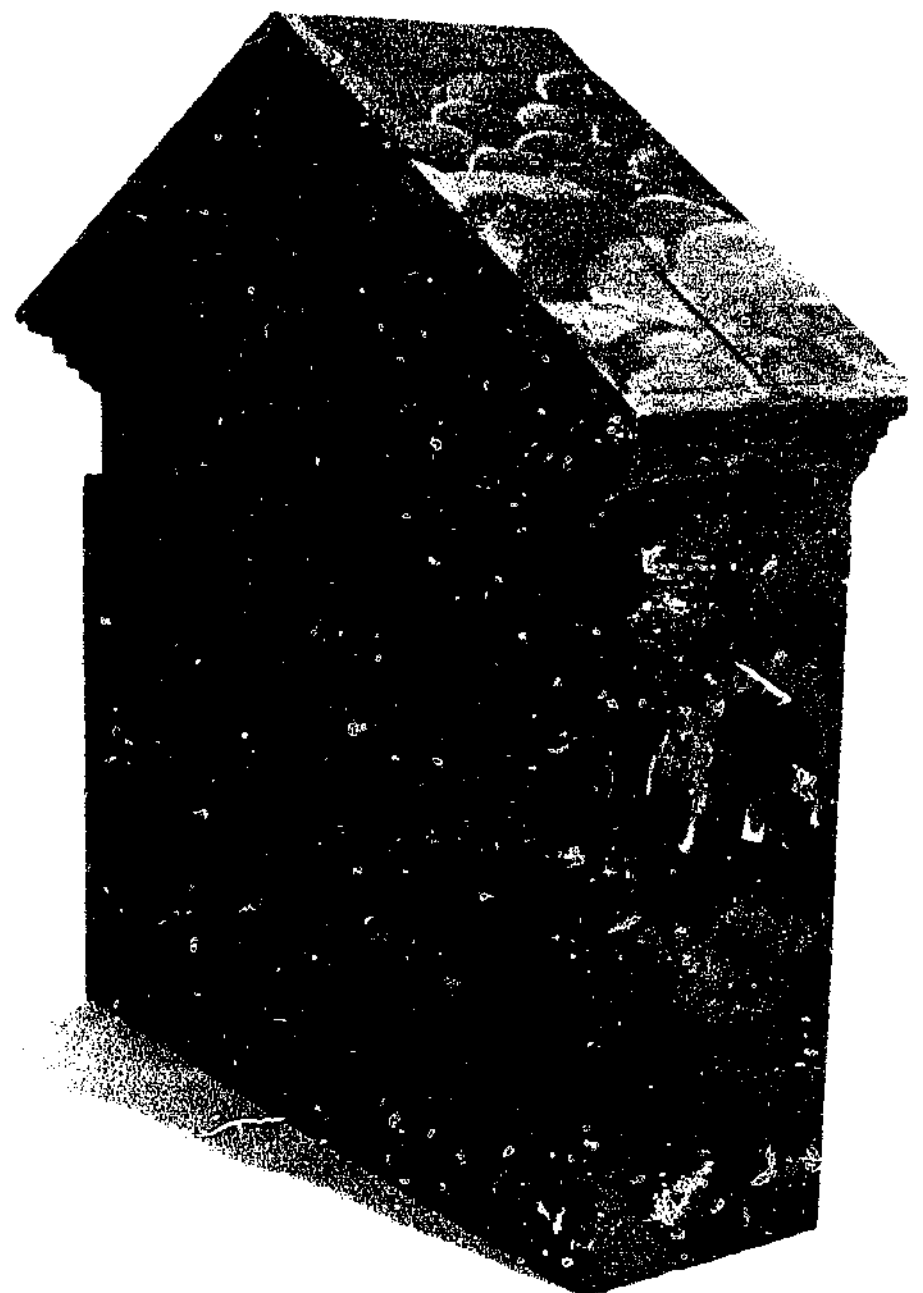*Bookshelf*
Fiberglass and Assorted Timber
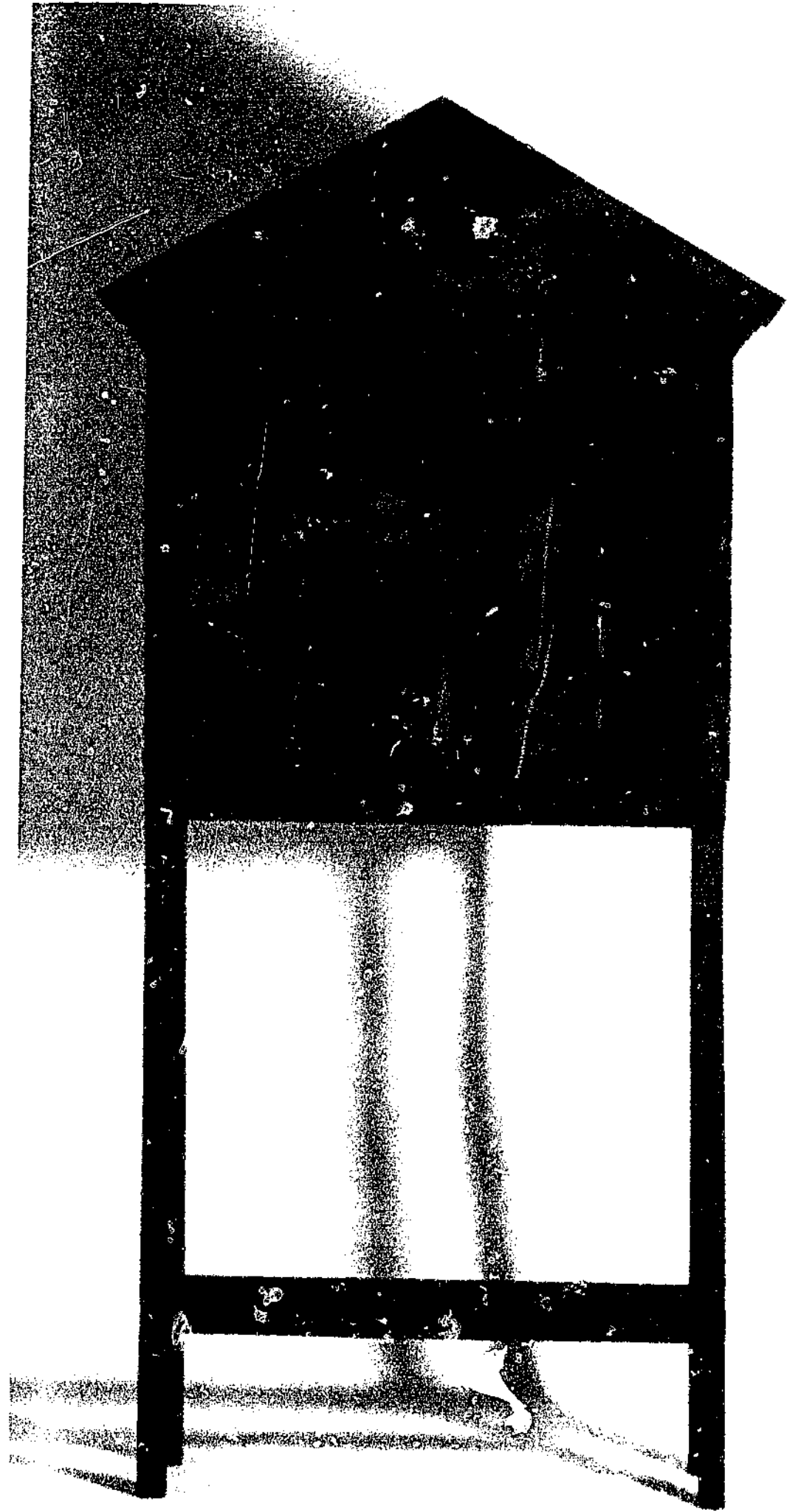234 x 63 x 39 cm
2003

Vault
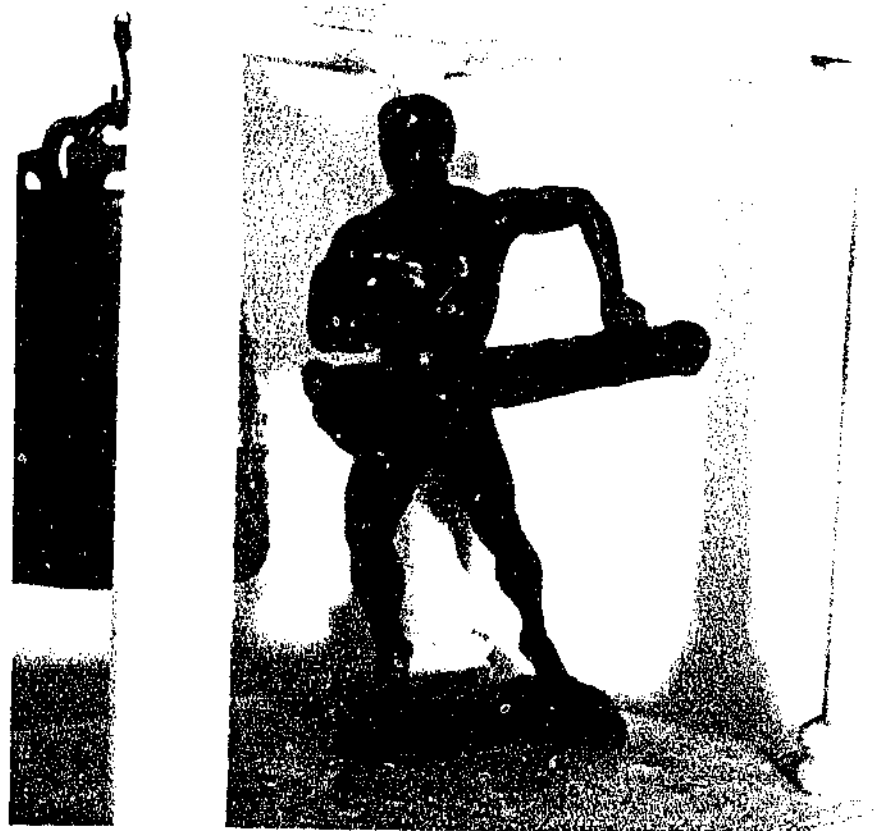Fiberglass and Assorted Timber
245 x 36 x 79 cm
2003

Imprint
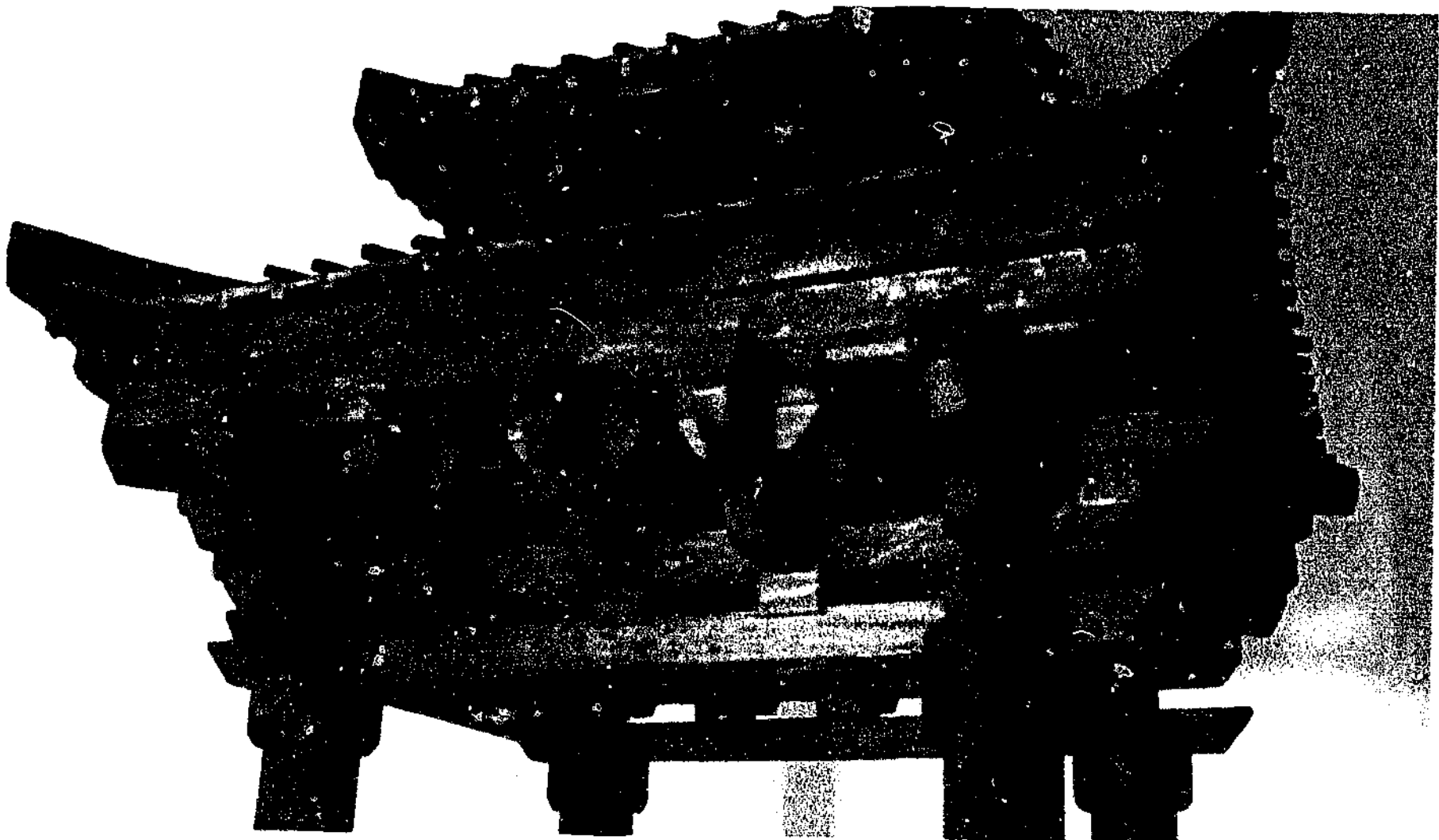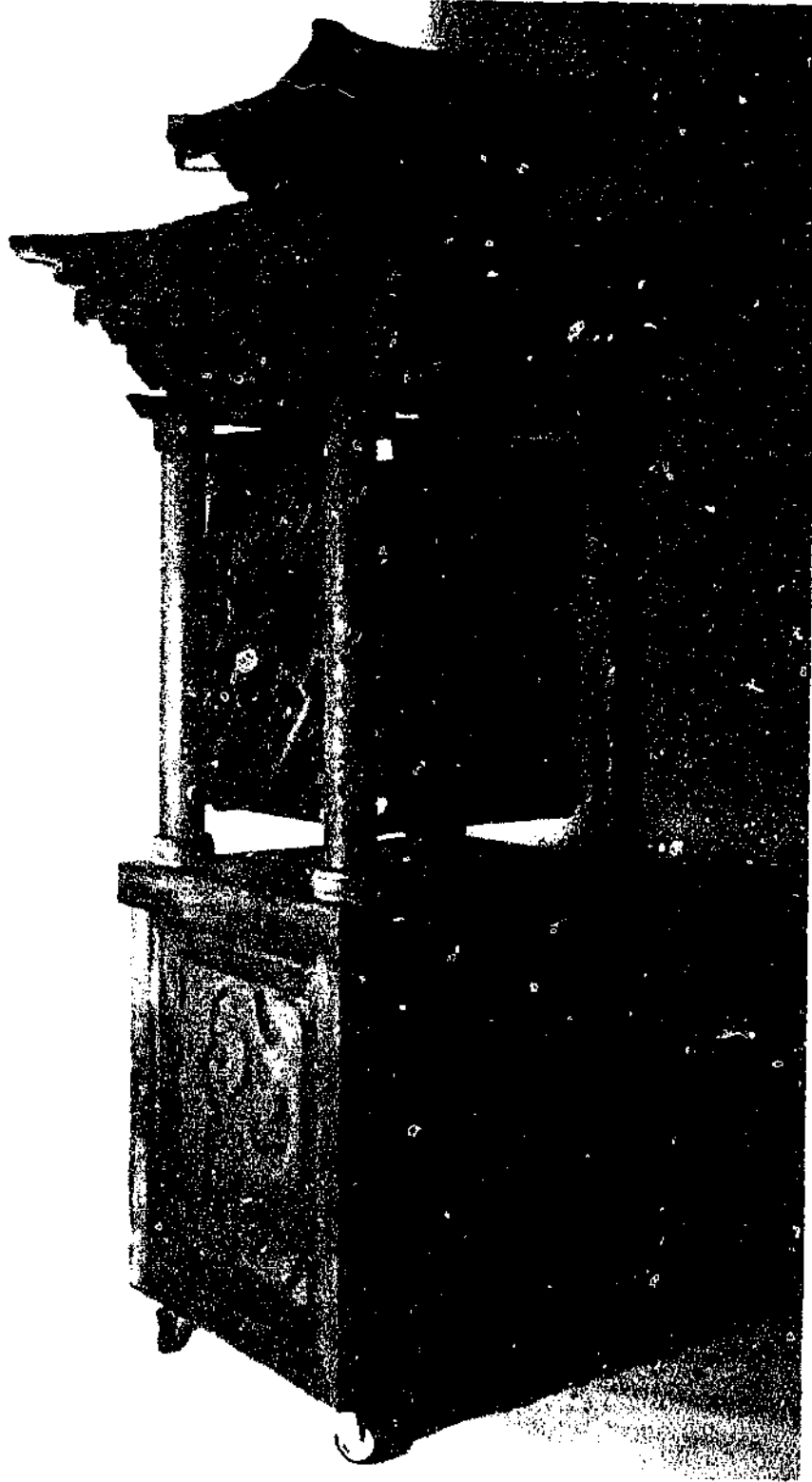Assorted Timber with Oil Paint
234x 78 x34 cm
2003

Entrapment
Assorted Timber and Fiberglass
278 x 45 x 87 cm
2002

Ripple
Bronze, Fiberglass and Assorted Timber
258 x 76 x 124 cm
2003

China Shop
Assorted Timber and Oil on Canvas Paper\
287x 104 x 125 cm
2003

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