



Anne Chu/MATRIX 184

Untitled

April 16 - June 18, 2000

**University of California
Berkeley Art Museum**

Anne Chu/MATRIX 184

“I wanted to make painted sculpture, because there have not been modern examples of it that really deal with the issues of both painting and sculpture. My interest is in the fusion of painting and sculpture so that the painting in the sculpture is intrinsic to the form making, not decorating it. This is a tradition that has been seen in many ancient cultures, but has not been thoroughly explored in our era.” —Anne Chu¹

Using a variety of mediums including wood, bronze, urethane, and ceramic, Anne Chu explores issues in sculpture and painting. Her process is to infuse painting into materials that are themselves used in unexpected ways. By shifting conventional expectations of the appearance of sculpture, the artist allows a reconsideration of the familiar. She is currently using traditional Chinese artifacts systematically as a base from which to work. She has remade T'ang dynasty ceramic funerary figures, sculpted Asian and Western-inspired landscapes, and painted luminous watercolors characterized by a subtle tension between abstraction and figuration. Chu traveled to China in 1995. Her experience helped inspire her choice of models for the Chinese-based pieces.

Chu's focus on painted sculpture began with a series of bears that stood over seven feet tall on their hind legs. Loosely based on the third-century-B.C. life-size terracotta warriors discovered in Xi'an, Chu's bears are cast paper statues; each is posed in an authoritative, balanced stance, palms up in a t'ai chi posture. Although the bodies of the bears are uniform, each face is astonishingly expressive. The chest plate shields derived from found t-shirt designs and common cultural icons such as a Masonic eye, or more personal symbols as in a Chinese character for the artist's own name, express each bear's individuality. For Chu, bears represent a wide range of symbolism and sentiment, and because of this oversaturation, function as blank slates. *“Unlike other animals, she said, bears do not stand for a specific type of ‘psychology.’”* Her next effort included a group of sculptures in which human heads were paired with bear heads. Then she began what for me signals her mature style: the appropriation of T'ang dynasty ceramic funerary figures.

The T'ang dynasty (618-907) was a period of economic and territorial expansion. The capital of Chang'an (modern Xi'an) was a bustling metropolis where merchants and traders of diverse ethnic origins brought exotic gifts, esoteric religions, and exquisite luxuries from faraway places for a sophisticated,



cosmopolitan clientele. This was an exciting period in Chinese history with a complex character. The artistic imagination of this time is evident in Buddhist and Daoist monuments, tomb sculptures, vibrant glazed ceramics, and ornamental accessories in metalwork and jade. Under the imperial patronage of T'ang emperors, peoples of wide-ranging religious, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds lived side by side in China's cities. For Chu, the T'ang funerary ceramics unsentimentally represent the complexity of the civilization.

I first saw Chu's T'ang figures in early 1998 in an exhibition at the AC Project Room in New York City. The experience of encountering contemporary art that is so refreshingly new and surprising took my breath away. In Chu's sculpture, I also found astounding, mesmerizing beauty. Chu's T'ang figures are inspired by historical icons but are completely unique. Her figures echo the expressions, gestures, and garments of their sources. Yet, they are made out of wood instead of porcelain. Depending on their size, they are carved with different power tools—ranging from chain saws down to minute dental tools. They are painted abstractly rather than realistically. The broad planes of arbitrary color Chu uses to paint the figures give them an irregular, heightened beauty. Finally, her sculptures are larger than the originals, standing twenty-eight inches high instead of ten or twelve inches.

Chu continues many of the practices of ancient Chinese artisans. She chooses figures from different regions. Her wooden figures are always based on photographs of actual ceramic figures. Chu prefers working from photographs of sculpture rather than directly from the objects because the *“lines are already flat and spatial at the same time.”*² Her appropriation of figures is accurate though slightly off—while she maintains the same stance, she takes liberties by changing the hands. In this way, Chu's technique mirrors the original. The bodies of all of the T'ang figures were made in molds, but artisans attached the heads and hands at various angles to add the essential spark of life. In life, fingerprints are used to identify people because no two hands are the same. Historically, individual craftspeople fashioned the same T'ang figures repeatedly in various

Seven Views of Landscape, Nos. 1-7, 1999, oil and casein on wood, dimensions variable. Courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Chicago.



sizes. Originally created as ubiquitous, secular objects, the individuality of the actual antique figures belies the ordinariness that one would expect to result from the hundreds or thousand of them that exist.

In Chu's *Ballplayer on Horse* (1998), an elaborately carved and painted male figure sits atop a bronze horse. Bronze horses, often with riders, were produced in groups, forming a procession to accompany a nobleman in burial. Chu's use of a figure mounted on a horse results from a general interest in these types of burial figures. Recognizing that different materials create a distinct sculptural presence, here Chu decided to couple bronze with wood. In Chu's sculpture, the bronze horse shares a patchy, expressive painting style with the figure. Head cocked to one side, one hand on his chest and the other raised in an extended gesture, the ballplayer is poised to throw. Horses were not just status symbols in ancient China but also a necessity for political survival.

Chu also creates sensuous, luminous watercolors in which the subjects, figures, or landscapes are only partially rendered. If Chu's *Small Landscape* (1999) were displayed without the title and removed from the context of her other works, one would take the drawing as purely abstract. Loosely painted and true to the medium of watercolor, bright colors pool at the bottom of animated, elongated shapes. Knowing Chu's idiosyncratic color schemes, the juxtaposition of yellow with lavender, red with olive green, and rose with chocolate brown may reference a waterfall flowing through a rough mountain landscape, with the sun burning through a foggy morning.

In her shift from the full figure to the portrait bust in a recent series, Chu again focuses on what is unique to the individual: the face. And again, she imposes an individuality on the T'ang figures. The people in these new portrait busts are copies of Chu's burial figures (which are of course copies of T'ang figures). Similar to the history of the repetitive process among Chinese artisans, Chu creates the same figures repeatedly. While Chu's images resemble known icons, they stand somehow separate, tentative, and thus more powerful for their subtle distortions or personalizations. Chu has created sculpture in a variety of

Guardian and House, 1999, cast iron and cast urethane, dimensions variable. Courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Chicago.



different sizes. Her interest in scale, however, usually relates to human scale—although slightly off. She uses scale as a sensory trigger to entice the viewer to consider the work several times over. In *Guardian and House* (1999), a multi-storied Han-style tower cast from bright orange urethane is surveyed by a cast-iron guardian figure that is suspended from the ceiling. Here, in opposition to realistic proportions, Chu makes the figure and the tower approximately the same size. The grimace of the guardian figure's face is perhaps intended to ward off intruders or evil spirits. As another means of establishing a dynamic and disconcerting relationship between the two objects, the gnarled surface of the bronze body contrasts with the smooth, elegant surface of the tower.

Chu has recently started making landscapes that signal another change in scale, from a hand-held object to a large-scale environment that also comprises a distant perspective. *Seven Views of Landscape* (1999) sits on the gallery floor allowing the viewer two uniquely combined perspectives: a bird's-eye view and a tactile, topographical one. Chu's efforts at sculpting the form are apparent through hatched gashes. Her actions mirror the profound change nature can have on the wide-open plains, creating new hills, valleys, and vistas. Here again, the use of color is diverse and expressive. While Chu mostly employs representational tones such as yellows, browns, and greens, she also uses shocking orange, royal blue, and pastel pink. Inspired by Chinese scroll painting and scholar's rocks, as well as by the landscape of the western United States, this combination continues her interest in the integration of painting and sculpture as well as the fusion of East and West in her work.

Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson
Phyllis Wattis MATRIX Curator

¹ This and all subsequent quotes are from Anne Chu, conversation with author, New York, November 23, 1999.

² Barry Schwabsky, "Anne Chu," *On Paper*, September/October 1997, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 20-21.

Anne Chu was born in 1959 in New York City. She attended Philadelphia College of Art in Pennsylvania where she received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1982. She then attended Columbia University in New York, and earned her Master of Fine Arts degree in 1985. Currently, Chu lives and works in New York City.

Selected Solo Exhibitions

2000
Indianapolis Museum of Art, Indianapolis, IN

1999
Donald Young Gallery, Chicago, IL
AC Project Room, New York, NY
Monica De Cardenas, Milan, Italy

1998
Cleveland Contemporary Arts Center, Cleveland, OH
Dallas Museum of Art, Dallas, TX
Marc Foxx Gallery, Los Angeles, CA

1996
AC Project Room, New York, NY

1995
"Au Reservoir," TZ'Art & Co., New York, NY

1993
Neuberger Museum of Art, State University of New York, Purchase, NY

Selected Group Exhibitions

2000
"Group Show," Victoria Miro Gallery, London

1998
"Surrogate: The Figure in Contemporary Sculpture and Photography," Henry Art Gallery, University of Washington, Seattle, WA
"In the Detail," curated by Kiki Smith, Barbara Gross Gallery, Munich, Germany

1997
"Anne Chu, Rachel Harrison, Donald Moffett, Jasmin Sian," Marc Foxx Gallery, Santa Barbara, CA
"Prop Fiction," White Columns, New York, NY

Small Landscape, 1999, watercolor on paper, 23-1/2 x 31 inches. Private Collection, New York.

1996
"25th Anniversary," John Weber Gallery, New York, NY
"Drawings from the Mab Library," AC Project Room, New York, NY

1995
"In Three Dimensions: Women Sculptors of the '90s," Snug Harbor Cultural Center, Staten Island, NY
"Delving and Tinkering," E.S. Vandam, New York, NY

1994
"Summer Survey," Alternative Museum, New York, NY

Selected Bibliography

Brenson, Michael. "The State of the City as Seen by Its Sculptors," *The New York Times*, July 2, 1990.
Corbetta, Caroline. "Anne Chu," *Flash Art*, November/December 1999, pp. 120-122.
Cotter, Holland. "Anne Chu," *The New York Times*, January 7, 2000.
Koplos, Janet. "Anne Chu at TZ'Art & Co.," *Art in America*, October 1995, p. 124.
Levin, Kim. "Choices: Art Short List," *The Village Voice*, November 19, 1996.
Pagel, David. "Otherworld Delicacy, Grace Mark Chu's Works," *Los Angeles Times*, May 8, 1998.
Schwabsky, Barry. "Anne Chu," *On Paper*, September/October 1997, vol. 2, no. 1, pp. 20-21.
Smith, Roberta. "Art in Review: 'Prop Fiction,'" *The New York Times*, February 14, 1997.
Volk, Gregory. "Anne Chu at AC Project Room," *Art in America*, February 1997, p. 96.

Court Lady, 1999, oil and casein on wood, 28 inches high, Collection University of California, Berkeley Art Museum; purchase made possible by a bequest from Thérèse Bonney

Guardian and House, 1999, cast iron and cast urethane, dimensions variable, Courtesy AC Project Room, New York

Landscape Nos. 1-7, 1999, oil and casein on wood, dimensions variable, Courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Chicago

Large Landscape, 1999, watercolor on paper, 48 x 50 inches, Collection Mr. and Mrs. Michael Mendelson, New York

Small Landscape, 1999, watercolor on paper, 23-1/2 x 31 inches, Private Collection, New York

Small Landscape, 1999, watercolor on paper, 22-1/4 x 30 inches, Collection Lucas Schoormans, New York

Stone Cliffs, 1999, watercolor on paper, 22-1/2 x 30 inches, Courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Chicago

Ballplayer on Horse, 1998, oil and casein on wood, bronze, 30 x 13 x 6 inches, Collection Colombe Nicholas and Leonard Rosenberg, New York

Lady on Horseback, 1998, oil and casein on wood, bronze, 24 x 22 x 9 inches, Collection Dean Valentine and Amy Adelson, Los Angeles

Installation view of *Anne Chu*, at the AC Project Room, New York, NY, 1996.

Performer with Bird, 1998, oil and casein on wood, 30 x 13 x 6 inches, Private Collection, New York

Study for Ballplayer on Horse with a Rock, 1998, watercolor on paper, 26 x 20 inches, Private Collection, New York

Warrior, 1998, oil and casein on wood, 29 x 9-1/2 x 7 inches, Collection John Bransten, San Francisco

Two Guardian Figures, 1997-98, oil and casein on wood, 27 x 9 x 6 inches each, Collection Mr. and Mrs. Michael Mendelson, New York

Warrior Standing on a Deer, 1997-98, oil and casein on wood, 30 x 13 x 6 inches, Collection Frederieke S. Taylor, New York

Study for Court Lady (Butterfly), 1997, watercolor on paper, 26 x 20 inches, Collection Penny Cooper and Rena Rosenwasser, Berkeley

Study for Court Lady with Bird, 1997, watercolor on paper, 26 x 20 inches, Collection Penny Cooper and Rena Rosenwasser, Berkeley

Work in MATRIX

Please Note:

Anne Chu will give an artist's talk on Sunday, April 16, 2000, at 3:00 p.m.


Dr. Jonathan Hay will present a lecture, "'Use the Past to Serve the Present': When Contemporary Artists Engage with the History of Chinese Art," on Thursday, April 27, 2000, at 7:30 p.m. in the Museum Theater.

Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson will give a curator's walkthrough of the exhibition on Sunday, June 4, 2000, at 3:00 p.m.

Concurrent with Anne Chu/MATRIX 184 *Untitled* is an installation of T'ang dynasty burial figures in the Berkeley Art Museum's Asian Galleries curated by Anne Chu. We would like to thank Sheila Keppel, Consulting Curator for Asian Art, for her expertise and assistance in facilitating this installation, and the Warren King Family of King & Company, San Francisco, for their generosity in lending the T'ang objects.

The MATRIX Program at the UC Berkeley Art Museum is made possible by the generous endowment gift of Phyllis Wattis.

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The museum also wishes to thank Celeste and Anthony Meier  for their support of

cover: *Court Lady* (detail), 1999, oil and casein on wood, 28 inches high. Collection University of California, Berkeley Art Museum; purchase made possible by a bequest from Thérèse Bonney.

above: *Young Bear*, 1996, ink on paper, 40 x 26 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Ballplayer on Horse, 1998, oil and casein on wood, bronze, 13 x 6 x 30 inches. Collection Colombe Nicholas and Leonard Rosenberg, New York.