



Sisters Bo, Ling and Hong Zhang fuse East and West in their own ways, at Whitespace

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By Catherine Fox

The mash-up of cultures in our global society is a frequent theme in contemporary art. Typically, the condition is a source of tension. Chinese artist Chi Peng depicts the collision of East and West in his [“Journey to the West”](#) series. Afro-British artist Yinka Shonibare critiques colonialism. Atlantian Fahamu Pecou expresses ambivalence about the spread of hip hop in Africa in his [“Whirl Trade”](#) paintings.



The Zhang sisters, from left: Hong, Ling, Bo

For plenty of other artists, however, hybridity is a fact of life. Atlantians [Jiha Moon](#) and [Gyan Hur](#), both Korean-American, demonstrated as much in their recent exhibits, as do Ling, Hong and Bo Zhang, sisters who are exhibiting together at [Whitespace](#) through April 3. As I noted in my review in the [AJC](#), they are fluent in both Chinese traditions and contemporary art and culture, and they blend them seamlessly.



Ling Zhang: "Dream of Butterfly-I, Pilgrim"

Ling Zhang mixes traditional Chinese landscape, symbolism and her interest in Tibetan Buddhism with naturalistic figures and a dash of the surreal in her dreamlike “Butterfly” paintings. Melding fine-line drawing and soft, washy watercolor on rice paper, the Marietta artist creates a meditative space — signaled by the Chinese ideal combination of mountains and water — in which to ponder the fragility of love, beauty and freedom personified by the giant hovering butterflies.

Bo Zhang’s lithograph series “Treasures” pair images of a beautiful Ming or Qing tea bowl with a piece of plumbing. Juxtaposed in different, sometimes witty configurations, they suggest a parade of opposites: the bowl bedecked with dragons or flowers in rich colors versus the anonymous white PVC pipe

or metal drain, the social act of taking tea versus the private act of elimination.



Treasure 2-2 22" x 32" A/E Lithograph 2008

Bo Zhang: "Treasure 2-2"

Yet she gives both elements the same respect: Each is depicted meticulously, and their presentation, denuded of any context on an otherwise blank sheet, gives them an almost sacred aura. Bo comments on the interconnectedness of everything — food in/waste out is all one cycle, after all.

Hong Zhang's striking scrolls, which depict large-scale disembodied heads of hair, merge Chinese fine-line technique with contemporary scale and attitude. The triptych "Three Graces" is a portrait of the Zhang sisters. The elder Ling is in the center, flanked by the twins, whose portraits hang a bit lower, perhaps in deference to their mother-like sibling. The Kansas-based

artist uses two types of charcoal and an eraser for highlights to describe what seems like every strand of the long, dark tresses.



Hong Zhang: "Three Graces"

Her imagery taps a vein in contemporary art as a symbol of identity politics. In contrast to its fraught meaning in works by African-American artists, Hong is proud of her long hair, which in China symbolizes the life force and sexual energy and is synonymous with beauty. They say you need conflict to make a good story, but the Zhang sisters demonstrate that harmony has its own rewards as well.

