

Creative Loafing Atlanta

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Three sisters grace Whitespace Gallery

Ling, Bo and Hong Zhang work shows solidarity and individuality

by Deanna Sirlin

Sometimes, art is the family business. Charles Willson Peale and his brother James were respected American artists of the 18th and 19th centuries, as were their sons and daughters. Their children, including Rembrandt, Rubens, Raphaele, Titian, and Angelica Kauffmann Peale, lived up to the greatness of their family name by continuing the tradition of painting.

A similar dynasty of artists has taken over Whitespace Gallery for the show *From Beijing to Atlanta*: sisters Ling, Bo and Hong Zhang. The Zhang sisters are the children of professors at China's Luxun Academy of Fine Arts. They've all studied in Beijing as well as the U.S. The Zhang sisters' work, while stylistically diverse, reflects their common experience of moving back and forth between east and west.

Outlined forms and soft, flat areas of color characterize Ling's (the trio's eldest) painterly drawings. Her style is reminiscent of R.B. Kitaj, an American artist who sought a pictorial representation of a mystical existence. Like Kitaj, Ling's work straddles the spiritual and real worlds.

Ling mixes watercolor, ink, and pencil or charcoal. The media suit her imagery. A dreamlike pilgrim morphs into a butterfly in "Dream Of Butterfly II - Expedition," while the drawing's other Buddhist monks retreat into a traditional Chinese landscape.

Ling's large, four-panel drawing "Culture and Nature" extends scroll-like across the gallery wall. The 2006 work of branches bursting from a student's desk is based on an installation by her sister Hong. Using the same imagery to different ends demonstrates the sisters' deep connection. It's a pity Hong's original installation isn't on view at Whitespace.

Hong's charcoal drawings on paper show scalpfuls of long hair detached from their bodies. Her triptych "The Three Graces" (charm, beauty and happiness, according to Greek mythology) depicts three vertical skeins of flowing silky black hair, each on an individual scroll. The exquisitely drawn charcoals render each strand of hair larger than life-size. In Chinese culture, hair symbolizes the life force. Presented here, free of the body, the locks evoke the power of the spirit.



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AARON PADEN

Hong Zhangs Three Graces (triptych)

From Beijing to Atlanta

Through April 3. Free.
Wed.-Sat., 11 a.m.-5
p.m. 814 Edgewood Ave.
404-688-1892.
www.whitespace814.com.

Hong's twin, Bo, mixes not only east and west, but also high and low. In her pristine series of lithographs with phototransfer titled "Treasures," precious Chinese bowls from either the Ming or Qing dynasties are juxtaposed with 20th-century pipes, drains, and other plumbing fixtures. The resulting hybrids are delightfully unnerving — an unexpected dialogue between mundane modern necessities and rare porcelain treasures from the past.

Throughout the history of art, the Three Graces were rarely treated as individuals; usually, they were represented as a trinity of female strength. When viewed together, the Zhang sisters' work expresses both solidarity and individuality. All address the dichotomies of east and west that define their lives, lending power and clarity to each other's work through contrast. These three graces of art, Ling, Bo and Hong, are creating new traditions for the family business.

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