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Gallery Sketchbook

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Gallery Sketchbook | Contemporary Tibetan Art

LEIGH MILLER

In the 1980s, a few intrepid Tibetan artists, moved by the post-Cultural Revolution resurgence of Tibetan culture and religion, felt compelled to discover the roots of their traditions within themselves despite their upbringing in Communist, modernizing China. The quest to develop strategies for self-representation of their hybrid experiences and rapidly changing environment sparked, and continues to fuel, the contemporary Tibetan art movement. This movement also speaks to centuries of Tibetan representations as Other to western and Han imaginations. Through artists' collective organizing, various associations and galleries have provided social, creative, and economic support. The most successful of such efforts has been the Gedun Choephel Artists Guild, founded in 2003 in Lhasa. International group and solo exhibitions have dramatically increased since then, and now include artworks by Tibetans living in the Tibetan diaspora, alongside those working in the PRC.

This gallery sketchbook highlights works created within the past five years by established and newer artists from, and largely working in, Himalayan Tibetan societies. Most were shown in

one of three landmark exhibits, in the US, Asia, and Europe. The dynamic and sweeping 'Scorching Sun of Tibet' was curated by Gadé and the Chinese art critic Li Xianting and opened in Beijing in 2010. The Trace Foundation's 'Transcending Tibet' exhibit (New York, 2014) explored Tibetan identities and influences worldwide, while the global Imago Mundi project offered the more than 100 works in 'Tibet: Made by Tibetans', exhibited in 2015 in Venice.

One finds, of course, a full range of human emotions and experiences in the current contemporary Tibetan art movement. However, political change in Tibet since 2008, including protests and self-immolations, has led to a decline in playfulness, humor, and juxtapositions of the more mundane ironies of globalization. Discrimination, surveillance, and curtailed religious and civic expression yield artistic expression of internal and collective states of anxiety, loss, alienation, and despair. Palpable tensions intersect—between cultural identity and commoditization, spiritual aspiration and fear, sustenance and ephemera. These windows into Tibetan realities reveal both transparent and veiled subjectivities, but this art asserts – through roots in Buddhist tradition, personal memory, and innovation – visions of cultural sustainability and the cherishing of a Tibetan future.



Jamyang Tulku. *Foodism* (one of a two part work). Painted incense-burned rice paper over cardboard. 97 x 49 cm, 2014.

Used by permission of Trace Foundation, and published in the catalog accompanying the exhibition "Transcending Tibet," March 14-April 12, 2015, New York.



Tenzing Rigdol. Wrathful Dance, silk brocade, collage, 91 x 91 cm, 2014.

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Front Outside Cover

Dedron, Untitled, acrylic on canvas. 12x10cm, 2013.

Used by permission of Imago Mundi (Luciano Benetton Collection) and published in the catalog Tibet: Made by Tibetans, 2015.

Back Outside Cover

Penpa, Tragedy and Comedy, collage and acrylic on canvas. 140x140cm, 2014.

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Front Inside Cover

Chimei Yangchen, Untitled, mixed media. 12x10cm, 2013.

Used by permission of Imago Mundi (Luciano Benetton Collection) and published in the catalog Tibet: Made by Tibetans, 2015.



Benchung, *Meditator: Beware*, acrylic on canvas, 80 x 120cm, 2014.

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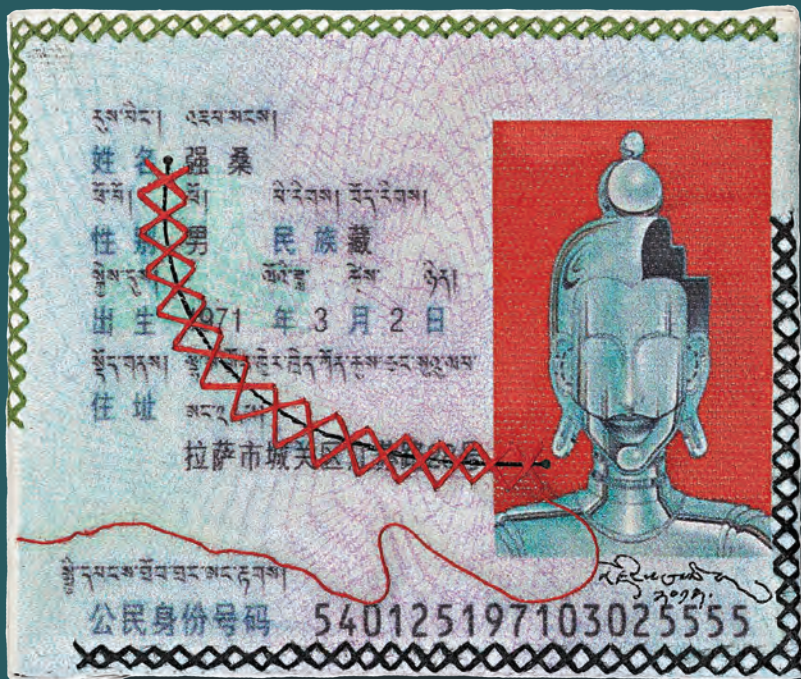
Nortse. *Dreams in Paper Boats*, mixed media. 135 x 135 cm, 2015.
Courtesy of Rossi and Rossi.



Sonam Drolma Brauen. *Yishen No.24*, mixed media on canvas, 2012.
Courtesy of the artist.



Tsering Gyatso Chuteng, *Black Dance*, watercolor on canvas, 10x12cm, 2013.
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 published in the catalog *Tibet: Made by Tibetans*, 2015.



Jhamsang, *Who Am I*, Mixed media, 12 x 10 cm, 2013.
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 published in the catalog *Tibet: Made by Tibetans*, 2015.