

## 'Chinese Political Pop'

**Nathan A. Bernstein**

This energetic show highlighted 26 works that reminded viewers why contemporary art from mainland China first attracted Western collectors in the 1990s. Graphic and punchy, the colorful images blended American Pop with Chinese icons of the cultural revolution in a way that paralleled the rapid commercialization and demise of idealism in post-Tiananmen Square China.

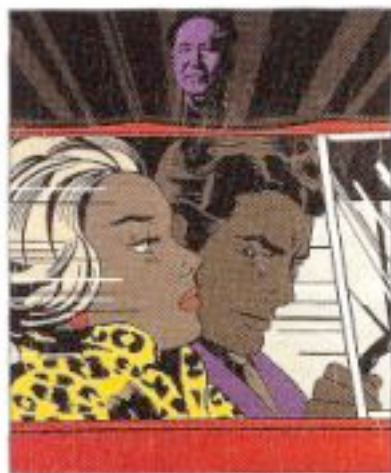
On view were works by Wang Guangyi, a leader in the Chinese Political Pop movement whose paintings soared at auction. The artist's *Mao* (1989) is a small version of his mural-size portrait showing the leader's face behind a grid of black bars that sold for more than \$4 million at Phillips de Pury & Company in 2007. There were also recent works from his

"Great Criticism" series, in which revolutionary figures brandish corporate logos, as in *Great Criticism: Chanel* (2005), a lithograph with bright pink heroes popping out of a vibrant blue background. Li Shan, known for appropriating a famous portrait of Mao as a young soldier, was represented by works such as a 1995 collage, *Mao (Rouge Series)*, in which a poster of Mao in Tiananmen Square features a lotus blossoming from his lips.

Two of the artists here live in North America. The New York-based Zhang Hongtu, who was censored by Chinese authorities when he tried to show his work in China, presented the installation *Ping-Pong Mao* (2007), a full-scale Ping-

Pong table with Mao's silhouette cut out from the field on each side of the net as a reminder that politics is ever present. Wang Zhiwei, who lives in Canada, also had difficulty in China showing paintings that insert the face of Mao into appropriations of works by Roy Lichtenstein, as in *Hopeless* (1997-2008).

Also here was a small lithograph by Warhol depicting Mao in Technicolor hues. It seems the chairman has inspired artists on both sides of the globe to the point that it is hard to tell whether his visage can be considered threatening or even political. —**Barbara Pollack**



Wang Zhiwei, *Hopeless*, 1997-2008, acrylic on canvas, 90 1/2" x 74 1/2".  
Nathan A. Bernstein.