

# Arts

## Chinese artist displays mastery of symmetry and composition

By BONNIE MITTEN

The interaction between humanity and nature is symbolized in the artwork of Gu Xiong, one of two artists from the Republic of China who have come to Canada to study and exchange artistic ideas. The exhibit which is in the Faculty Lounge, Fine Arts Building is comprised of works dealing with Xiong's experiences growing up in the Seichuan province (under artistic restrictions) complimented by works completed during his year in Canada. The majority of Xiong's works are woodcuts that demonstrate his mastery of line, balance and composition.

Although his work will only be on display for one week, September 28 to October 9, Xiong will be in Toronto for one month and will have an exhibit at a downtown gallery. All of this attention is very exciting for Xiong who had never been outside of China before this trip. Xiong's early studies were spent at the Banff School of Fine Arts where he was one of a group of artists from all over the world. This artistic-cultural exchange was not only important for Xiong but also for China because his

position as a Lecturer at the Seichuan Fine Arts Institute, will allow him to share his experiences in Canada with his students in China.

In studying Xiong's art it is interesting to note how his experiences and his concern for humanity and nature become a common link in his art even though his subject matter changes. His earliest series of woodcuts at first glance appear to be a Chinese version of European Art Naive where the subject matter is 'life on a farm.' Xiong spent four years living and working on a rice plantation. These early woodcuts are small and use a basic black ink on white paper format. The woodcuts are unsophisticated but there is a remarkable sense of line and balance which was developed further in the artist's later works. Xiong describes the woodcuts of his hometown by saying: "I love the ancient calm streets and alleys of China, the swaying geometrical shapes of houses, and the long, winding brick roads leading to eternity."

The first thing one will notice about the works Xiong has completed in Canada is their scale. Where his earlier woodcuts were

small, delicate, even understated; his new works are big and bold with stronger lines. His medium has changed as well, where it was primarily black ink in the early woodcuts, now the tendency is to use pencil, charcoal and conté.

'River and Clouds' a 9x15 foot landscape, seen from above is somewhat metaphorical in that river and cloud symbolize freedom to the Chinese, and it is a new artistic freedom that has allowed Xiong to express his feelings in this form.

And while it's true that there have been many freedoms gained in recent years since the westernization of China began; according to Xiong, "There still are a lot of things you can not express." For example, one of his works is a detailed drawing of six political figures who were considered revolutionaries at the turn of the century. Many people in China today, including Xiong, consider these men patron saints. But while they may admire their courage they are unable to express it. "This picture would not be considered good in China," said Xiong.

When Xiong visited Calgary he was so impressed with the ranches (more specifically, the corrals) that he has done a number of charcoal drawings of them. In his perception of the corrals, he exaggerates their height, creating walls that not only confine but seem to close-in on the observer. Looking at these walls one begins to understand what they must represent for the artist:

"Life always appears to have enclosures dividing humanity and nature. Humanity conquers nature but in the meanwhile, humans make many enclosures for themselves... I hope that one day humans can discard these enclosures from outside or inside, thus better comprehending and awakening infinite life in that link with nature."—Gu Xiong



HEAD IN THE CLOUDS: Gu Xiong stands in front of his charcoal work on paper entitled "Interior Vision—River and Clouds."



Opening this week in the Art Gallery of York University is Andrew Danson's new collection of photographs, *Unofficial Portraits*. This is a strangely candid, yet-not-candid series of self-portraits shot by a wide cross-section of Canadian politicians from Brian Mulroney on down. Danson set up the camera and they pushed the button. (The remote control is featured in each photograph.) In this often genuinely funny collection, Frank Miller stands beside a bust of John A. MacDonald, Brian Mulroney gazes proudly upon the globe and Robert Bourassa stares rapt at a glass of milk. *Unofficial Portraits* opens in the AGYU on October 2 and runs to October 30.

## Slugs not sluggish

By MARK EKLOVE and LORNE MANLY

Although they are not the most successful band of the '80s, Doug and the Slugs certainly rank as one of the most energetic. With their non-stop mix of rock and revelry, the Slugs entertained the faithful last Tuesday on their annual pilgrimage to the Diamond.

Doug Bennett, the band's pudgy and provocative ringmaster, displayed his warped sense of humour throughout the Slugs' two-hour set. "A man addicted to the sound of his own voice," according to keyboardist Simon Kendall, Doug verbally abused the audience while the band played a pot pourri of their greatest hits as well as a half dozen yet to be released songs.

Starting with "1-2-3" from Bennett's solo album *Animato* the Slugs moved their way through material spanning the decade. The rowdy crowd accompanied the Vancouver-based band during old favourites such as "Making It Work," "Too Bad," and "Day By Day," leading Bennett to good-naturedly conclude that Torontonians were "A pocket of people that sing bad." Then, to appease the crowd he had just offended, Bennett lauded into an Elvis-style rockabilly version of "God save the Queen," dedicated to the citizens of southern Ontario.

Never in danger of taking himself

too seriously, Bennett pranced through the audience, inviting patrons to skip rope with his microphone wire, all the while doing his best Dr. Koop impersonation. Pulling cigarettes right out of people's mouths and packages, Bennett destroyed the cancer sticks and then embarked on a safe sex campaign by proclaiming "No glove, no love."

Bennett also dispelled any rumours of Pink Floyd dropping by after their concert at the Ex by admitting it was he that planted the rumour to boost ticket sales and that he was "in fact Roger Waters." Bennett's claim of being a "skinny English rock star," however, was belied by his paunchy image on the video screen, which he admired on numerous occasions over the course of the evening.

Despite Bennett's kibbitzing, the band's music remained the focal point. With new songs such as "Same Old Song," "Find Out," and "Falling to Pieces," the Slugs appear to have a solid basis for their next album, tentatively scheduled for a March release. In the meantime Doug and the boys will continue to do what they enjoy most: slugging out a concert nearly every night, which has earned them the reputation of Canada's foremost club band. Last Tuesday night's performance only enhanced that prestige.

### A R T S C A L E N D A R

#### GALLERIES

**Alison-Binder-Ouelette**, works by the artist. IDA Gallery (102 Fine Arts Bldg.), Oct. 5-9.

**Gu Xiong**, works on paper by a visiting artist from China. Purple Lounge, 3rd floor, Fine Arts Bldg. Until Oct. 9.

**Unofficial Portraits**, a collection of unofficial photographs of Canadian Politicians. AGYU (N145 Ross), Oct. 2-30.

**Julio Barragan**, 30 colourful oil paintings by the Argentine artist. Zacks Gallery (109 Stong), Oct. 1-28.

**Rick/Simon: Printed Matter**, a selection of photography and offset printed posters, postcards and magazine covers. Glendon Gallery, until Oct. 18.

**Gilda Melker**, acrylics on canvas by the artist. Winters Gallery (123 Winters), Oct. 6-17.

#### PUBLICATIONS

**Yak Magazine** will publish on Nov. 16. immortalize yourself by sending writing and visuals to 104C Winters or to 257 Concord Ave., Toronto, M6H 2P4. Deadline is Oct. 17. Legible submissions treated with special attention.

#### MUSIC

**Lunchtime Jazz**. CHRY-FM (Radio York) presents live jazz in the Vanier Junior Common Room free of charge. Oct. 6 at noon.

**Canadian Piano Trio Concert**, artists in residence of the Music Department will perform works by Beethoven and Dvorak. Winters Senior Common Room, Oct. 7 at 12:30 p.m.

If you are planning an arts event, drop by Excalibur at 111 Central square or call 736-3202 and ask for Jennifer or Adam.

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