

ROME

“Beware of the Wolf”

The American Academy

In an interesting change for one of Rome's august foreign institutes, a three-stage exhibition organized by curators Lorenzo Benedetti and Lexi Eberspacher successfully integrated emerging Italian artists with winners of the coveted Rome Prize. The exhibition, titled “Beware of the Wolf” (after the legendary she-wolf that suckled Romulus and Remus), was a wake-up call more than a warning, its aim to signal art action in the Eternal City. Each of the three parts took place in both rooms of the Academy's gallery and was on view for two weeks.

The first installment dealt with the “narrative process of storytelling,” according to material released by the curators. It featured the works of Tim Davis, Marco Raparelli, Federico Pietrella, Andrea Salvino and Calveh Zahedi. Davis, a fellow at the Academy, exhibited photographs of political posters from his series “Politicians in Cyan.” The colors of these works were a faded pale blue, symbolizing “the way politics swallows ideas, rendering idealistic positions battered, but beautiful,” according to a statement by the artist. Less literal was an installation by Pietrella titled *20.03.08* (which was the opening date of “Beware of the Wolf”). Flashlights laid in a row on the floor beamed small nimbuses of light onto two walls. The lamps were each different

Annie Han and Daniel Mihalyo: *Adoration Turning Yellow*, 2008, mixed mediums; at the American Academy.



in brand and design, and the cumulative effect of their various orbs—dozens of humble, Robert Irwin-like light sculptures—was hauntingly poetic. The piece had a “performance” aspect: the flashlights' batteries gradually drained over the course of the show, dimming the lamps.

The theme of the second part was nature, though this construct seemed forced in some cases. In a technically mesmerizing work, *Moments Forming a Memory* (2008), Academy fellow Adam Chapman presented computer-animated drawings whose components continuously reassemble into constellations of abstract and figurative forms. Lisa Switkin showed *Soil Core* (2008), a tall cylinder of soil samplings that she had collected from ancient Roman circuses. Flavio De Marco exhibited the abstract painting *Paesaggio* (2007), which looked like overlapping pastel-colored computer windows but also brought to mind works by Richard Diebenkorn.

The final section of “Beware of the Wolf” focused on the nature of the exhibition space. Its high point was Alessandro Piangiamore's *The place where I usually spend more time in space, the place where I would like to spend more time in space* (2008). According to the artist, the places referred to in the title are his motor scooter and outer space. The work consisted of a pine table on which rested a framed panel, juxtaposing photographs of outer space and a cave with bats. Propped on the corner of the table was a resin cast of the artist's *motorino* seat, its central crevice filled with water, as if after a rain. Stanislao di Giugno showed a work about measurement, where the distance between New York and Rome was represented by black thread on large spools. In *Exchange*, Marco Fedele di Catrano used the familiar tactic of removing plaster from the wall, in this case to form the stars of the European Union flag. Annie Han and Daniel Mihalyo created a simulated window within the gallery space, backlit as if light were shining through. “Rays” of yellow yarn spilled out onto the floor.

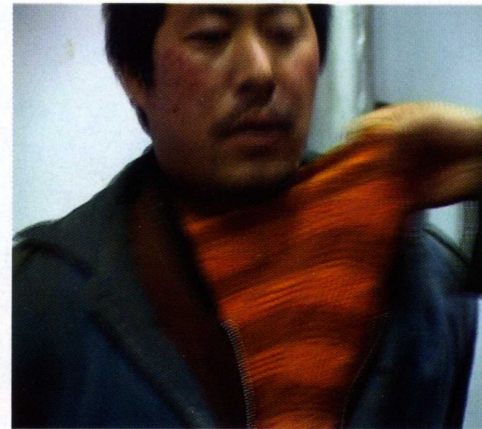
The charming aspect of Benedetti and Eberspacher's tripartite exhibition was that it made no claims to be historical or definitive. National divisions were irrelevant, and a very unacademic vibration was set in motion. The wolf raised its head and sniffed the fresh air.

—Cornelia Lauf

BEIJING

Zhao Liang Three Shadows

Zhao Liang was the first artist featured in the 2008 series of one-person shows at Three Shadows Art Center, a leading venue for photography in Beijing (founded in 2007 by the well-known husband-and-wife team Rong Rong and Inri, and designed by artist-architect Ai Weiwei).



Zhao Liang: *Interrogation Under Duress*, 2004, three-channel video, 7 minutes; at Three Shadows.

Zhao, a video artist who also makes documentary films, won the Best Director Award for *Crime and Punishment* (2007) at the One World Human Rights Documentary Film Festival in the Czech Republic. In his recent show at the center, he offered videos, still photographs and excerpts from his widely recognized films.

Like many artists working in China today, Zhao is highly conscious of social and environmental problems. On entering the multilevel exhibition space, viewers saw the three-channel video *Let Nature Take Its Course* (2003), a subtle, 20-minute celebration of China's natural beauty. As gentle rain falls on deep green lotus leaves, the iridescent drops of water capture the light, becoming luminous pools in close-up. The next work, however, shifted to social critique. For *Interrogation Under Duress* (2004), another three-channel video, visitors entered a red-velvet tent to see three criminal suspects being interrogated by the police. This remarkable real-life episode, taken from Zhao's *Crime and Punishment*, exposes a very different side of China. The hapless men, roughed up by officers who are shown only from the back, answer a rapid series of questions. One doesn't have to know Chinese to recognize the questioning as sharp, even pitiless.

In two photographic projects Zhao addresses ecological concerns. The “Beijing Green” series (2004-07) presents what look like the green hills and mountains so often portrayed in traditional ink paintings, but closer inspection discloses that the lush greenery is actually a net draped over construction debris, which rises a mere 20 feet in height. Seeing through the deception foils any romantic association with Chinese classical art. The “Water” series (2004-08) comprises exquisite pictures of a river at night; this time, scrutiny reveals that many items in the scene are waste materials—dead fish feature prominently. Zhao's insight into visual traditions betrayed by contemporary circumstances make for striking, highly intelligent works that linger in the mind.

—Jonathan Goodman