Finding utopia as an artform

THE BIG PICTURE

Felicity Allen

FOREVER elusive, the concept of utopia is still a fanciful notion for most of the world's citizens.

But in a new exhibition at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA), talented conceptual artists explore what it means to create paradise on earth.

Titled *Cycle of Tracks will Abound in Utopia,* the idea for the show comes from H.G. Wells' famous work, *A Modern Utopia,* and it asks artists to think of ways in which certain social, environmental and structural issues affect our ability to build a utopia.

One leading light in the installation genre is Sydney-based Chinese artist Guan Wei, who came to Australia in 1989. Not surprisingly, Wei is no stranger to the experience of dreaming of paradise and actually attaining it.

''It's very difficult to live in China, especially for an artist,'' Guan Wei says. ''I dreamt a lot about what it would be like to live in Australia. I knew a little bit about Australia, but I was always thinking that the country must be like a utopia, far away from everything, lots of space, peaceful and quiet.''

Wei's work, *Home of the Dream 2004*, is a series of floating images painted over three walls which have been designed to reflect our society's complex moral equations.

''When I was asked to be part of the exhibition I started to think about refugees and how they dreamed about going to a utopia, and the fact that it's not the easiest way of getting somewhere,'' Wei says.

''These refugees have been damaged by the political situations they have left. That's why I paint them like this — they are not complete,'' he says of the floating, disfigured forms.''

Louisa Bufardeci is also an exhibiting artist in the show with her work, *Team Joy*.

While appearing at first glance to be a merry environment of lollipop sticks painted in candy stripes, Bufardeci's piece is a complex survey of countries that belong to aid organisations.

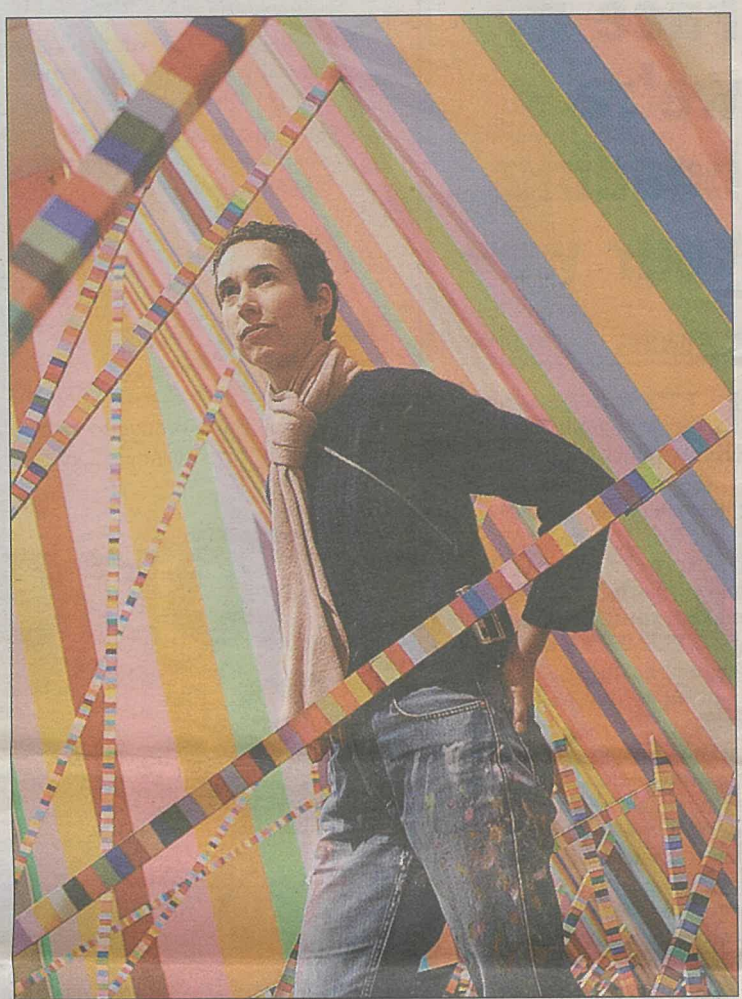
The countries, represented by stripes, have been colour-coded according to the principals of colour theory and listed alphabetically around the room.

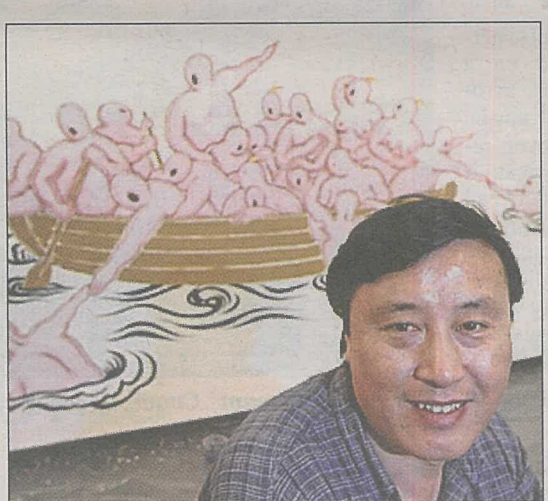
''I was thinking about how we work to create a utopia and international - aid organisations came to mind,'' she says. ''So I researched the organisations on the CIA website. It lists the international organisations each country is a member of. The thickness of each stripe on the wall relates to the number of organisations each country belongs to.

''The walls appear to be falling in and the sticks, which appear quite fragile, seem to be supporting the walls, but it's hard to know if organisations are supporting the building of a utopia or in fact are being crushed by that idea.''

Free lectures will be given for the duration of the show.

More information at www.accaonline.org.au.





Above: Louisa Bufardeci with *Team Joy.* Picture: ROB BAIRD

Left: Chinese artist Guan Wei. Picture: NORM OORLOFF

CYCLE OF TRACKS WILL ABOUND IN UTOPIA

Where: Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, 111 Sturt St, Southbank
When: Aug 7-Sept 26