



## Chen Yu 陈余

Trained in the art of engraving and having worked in the publishing industry, Chen Yu chose to become a painter to focus on creating a world of his own and to work by himself among his works, almost like traditional Chinese painters. Influenced by the art of printmaking, Chen Yu differentiates himself with the monotony of his subjects, which are cloned as if they were reproduced by the printing press. Rows of duplicated human heads are a constant symbolic feature in his paintings. Their repetition questions the place given to individuality and its expression. In some series of works, only one protagonist has his/her eyes open. The portraits repeat with boredom, with the figures looking detached from each other and forlorn, while among them one figure looks on. The artist's sense of humour is perceptible in the way he illustrates individuality. The gestures or expression of the singled out character is most of the time hilarious. Sometimes picking one's nose, water being poured on one's bold head, looking at the spectator with a cigarette in one's mouth, etc. are examples of such attitudes the artist picks to make one person among his created crowds stand out. Above the figures, a single motif absurdly floats in the composition, breaking this monotonous pattern by bringing the attention away from the human subjects. Over the years, his style and technique have matured into more realistic aesthetics, still crisp but with more accomplished renderings and a more subtle colour palette. In recent works, Chen Yu explores individuality in new ways, the difference between the characters are shown in gender, outfits, and facial expressions. The figures appear to be more related, less isolated and if one individual is distinguished, the others seem to interact with him or her - their eyes are open.

Chen Yu's paintings represent the distinctive outlook of contemporary Chinese art, which has been influenced by 'Cynical Realism' in the late 1980s and 'Political Pop' in the 1990s. The progression shown through his work represents the form of Realism and the attitude of Cynicism, the later dwelling on the loss of political significance. As a result of the graphical repetitions, his images question the place of the self, the many identities and roles one plays in family and society. Some early works also convey a sense of alienation, while more recent one depicts interrelation. Chen Yu's paintings are an expression of his inner personal conflict and his discomfort in society, and his struggle with taking on new identities such as becoming a husband, a father and integrating such roles and relationships with existing ones, for instance, being a son. For the artist, the world created on the canvas is an escape, a way to avoid reality and his responsibilities and roles, to be by himself, undisturbed. Among the many characters he depicts, the artist considers some of his characters are bound to represent his own self. After the birth of his son, his paintings have conveyed more harmony among the figures, sometimes even playfulness, and less humorous criticism.

Chen Yu was born in Guizhou Province in 1969, in an era where children were raised under strict rules, accustomed to social guidelines and structure. He graduated from the Engraving Department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts (Beijing) in 1993. He is the middle child of the talented Chen family, which also includes older sister Yu Chen and younger brother Chen Li. He now lives and works in Beijing. He was a Top 30 Finalist for the Sovereign Art Foundation in 2005. He notably participated in the renowned traveling group Museum show, CHINaRT, curated by Walter Smerling (2002-2004).