



**Nuit**), 2002, ink on paper, 74 x 95.5 cm  
arts.

lief. In all of these there is a variety of painterly effects that invigorate the work and keep us captivated.

**Jonathan Thomson**



### Tsang Kin Wah at John Batten Gallery

**T**sang Kin Wah's work always catches us off-guard as it is simultaneously eye-catching, beautiful, and exuberantly offensive. Arranged in the cool elegance of delicately patterned foliate scrolls and tendrils that shimmer white on white, his text messages are designed to elicit a response not just from those involved in the art world but the general public. Statements such as BUY THE ART AND SHOW YOUR FUCKING TASTE and a tendril that starts as CHEAT THE ARTI\$T and then blossoms into ART FUCK / ART TRICK / ART CHEATER / ART DICK / ART LIAR are much more than just a rant about the challenges faced by artists in negotiating the commercial and professional minefields of the art world. They are also part of an elegantly cerebral exposé of the role of language in establishing and conveying meaning.

Tsang conceived his exhibition as both an installation and a three-week piece of performance art with the active participation and collusion of

the gallery owner. The work is presented as an exploration of the art market. Tsang began by covering all the walls of the gallery with sheets of wallpaper designed and screen-printed by him. These sheets were printed white on white in a repeat foliate pattern inspired by William Morris. In the 19th century, William Morris championed the handicrafts as way of returning the quality of design and manufacture in the decorative arts to pre-Industrial Revolution standards. His stance was a critique of the dehumanizing effects of industrialization and mass production. In Tsang's work the swirling tendrils of the design are composed of lines of text that describe aspects of the art market and are peppered with obscenities in both English and Chinese that force us to think about the connections between art and language; beauty, truth, and reality; and the role of the artist as the maker of objects in a post-industrial society.

On these hand-papered walls Tsang exhibits seven quite large white-on-white screen-printed paintings on canvas, each of which have a similar design and express similar sentiments as the wallpaper. As an exhibition in a commercial gallery, all of the paintings are for sale. However, as the exhibition is also an examination of the value of art — as art, as an object of beauty, as a vehicle for conveying meaning and as something with a "market" value—the pricelist includes both the current price (identical for each work and undoubtedly notional) and a scratched out price for the same works ranging from less than a quarter to double the final printed asking price.

These works display a clear debt to minimalism in their seductively simple surfaces which, despite being all white, appear to range from ice blue on off-white to cream on lilac, depending on the quality and nature of the available light. However, they go beyond formal minimalism in their exploration of the physiology of perception to examine also the psychology of physiognomy.

The use of obscenity is a vehicle by which the artist successfully addresses personal issues of identity and political issues of race, discrimination, and verbal abuse as intimidating as physical assault. The texts in English are explicitly blunt. Those in Chinese are in some ways much fruitier, as they also draw on local Cantonese vernacular, puns, and word games in order to give the power of the word a local context.

**Jonathan Thomson**



### Soe Moe at Lee Gardens

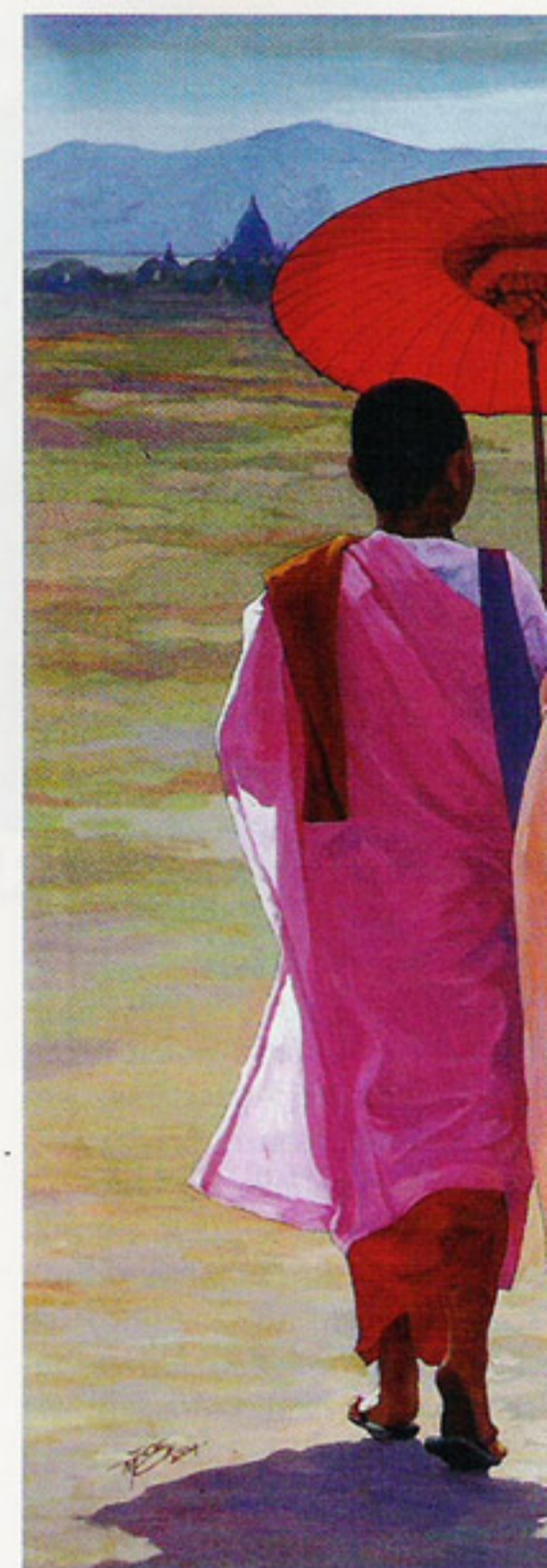
**O**ver the past 15 years, contemporary Myanmar art has gained a strong following among a broad range of collectors around the world. But unlike artists of Vietnam, those from Myanmar—with a few notable exceptions—remain firmly isolated from the mainstream regional and international art markets. This, however, is gradually changing as more regional galleries take greater interest in the modern and contemporary art from this culturally diverse country.

Among the leading artists in Myanmar regularly shown overseas is Soe Moe who is based in Yangon. His recent exhibition featuring work made

during the past five years—shown under the title *Colors of Myanmar* and organized by My Burma, Hong Kong—is a picturesque journey through a country of extraordinary beauty and color. While there are a few important Myanmar abstract artists in Yangon and Mandalay, the most immediately recognizable style is realism, with the figurative and landscapes dominating.

Soe Moe, who is also a well-known filmmaker in Myanmar, works within the realistic figurative and landscape tradition. His works in this show are readily accessible with images of anonymous monks, nuns, and novices dominating which, as in the work of Min Wae Aung, are most frequently viewed from behind. With heads shaved there is an androgynous quality to the figures, distinguished only by the color of their robes. It is rare that he shows any faces: when he does, the smiles on them radiate a deep contentment, even joy at times. There is rarely any feelings of tension in Soe Moe's work.

The most impressive of Soe Moe's monk and nun paintings are those where he shows them moving away from the viewer, either individually or in a group. *Visit to Bagan* (2004) exemplifies Soe Moe's figurative style clearly. Here he places his figures within a broader landscape than usual, which



**Soe Moe, Visit to Bagan**, 2005, acrylic  
Courtesy of My Burma.

enhances the presence of his subjects. The stillness of the figures, in their bright pink and cream robes, moving across a wide plain towards the distant horizon where the tops of ancient pagodas can be seen, sug-



**Tsang Kin Wah**,  
Installation view.  
Photograph by  
Jonathan  
Thomson.