RMIT Gallery is proud to present the first major solo exhibition of Chinese Australian artist Liu Xiao Xian *From East to West.*

Xiao Xian’s work comes from a deeply thoughtful curiosity and desire to reconcile the differences between Chinese and Australian life as he experiences it.

His incisive and witty take on these contrasts is seen in the super imposition of his own face on classic Australian historic stereoscope images, or chess sets with native species of platypus, kookaburras, koalas and dingoes lining up against introduced species such as rabbits, foxes, sheep, cows and horses.

*The Way We Eat* is another example of his candid observation of culture; a long row of Western eating implements in all manner of ornate forms is juxtaposed with one simple pair of chopsticks.

*From East to West* will show a full spectrum of Xiao Xian’s work from his early art practice in China, his distinctive Australian sculptures and photography, to new video installation work made in recent months in China.

Xiao Xian left China with his brother Ah Xian to live in Australia, post Tiananmen in 1990. They had been invited to provide a visual presence at the first Sydney Spring International Festival of New Music.

As a child his rudimentary art training came through drawing images of Mao (for which he won a prize), workers and propaganda. The echoes of the Cultural Revolution were about secrecy and hiding history and things of value.

He subsequently trained as an optical engineer in Beijing and later earned a BA (Hons) in Photomedia and Masters at the University of Sydney.

In the large-scale digital work, *Reincarnation-Mao, Buddha & I* (version II) Xiao Xian uses the image of each incarnation, through a digital printing process to make the image of another. For example, a portrait of Mao Zedong is made up of thousands of images of the artist. The
implications of the image of Mao, Buddha and Xiao Xian constituting each other in this fascinating work, are Confucian as well as Buddhist, and of course, ultimately political.

Xiao Xian described this work in the catalogue essay for his exhibition *My Other Lives* at the Contemporary Art Centre in South Australia in 2002.

“The creation of this work is based on the tenets of Taoism, Yin and Yang,” he said.

“Adapting the idea of reincarnation, this work speaks of the constant transformation of the cycle of life. The images of Mao – a political icon once worshipped like a god, Buddha – the icon of Buddhism, and myself, are used to explore the relation of a political figure, a religious icon and an ordinary man.

“Furthermore the delicacy of changes from the small scale to that of the whole may lead us into thoughts about micro verses macro,” he said.

Xiao Xian is also well known for his diptych *Our Gods*, which uses montage and digital manipulation to create a monumental work of a laughing Buddha and a suffering Christ, reconstructed from tiny repetitive images.

In contrast his poster size stereograph-like photographs in the series *My Other Lives* feature the artist masquerading as different people often from Victorian times. This is an ongoing project where the artist questions photographic truth, a notion he interprets as related to Mao’s idea of humanity creating history.

Xiao Xian said that he had never appreciated the real beauty of a stereograph until he looked through the viewer and the dual image format prompted him to use its unique characteristics, to adapt and shift the perspective difference into identity alteration.

RMIT Gallery Director, Suzanne Davies said “Liu Xiao Xian is one of the most compelling contemporary Chinese Australian artists, who explores the nuances between East and West with wide-ranging curiosity, playfulness and wit, and remarkable openness to employing diverse materials.

“The resulting artworks reveal some profound differences in points of view between East and West, as well as shared concerns and values.

“While the creative manifestations are diverse, there is an absolutely clear sense of the artist’s resonantly playful DNA in every work,” she said.

His latest installation work *The Great Wall of China*, was created in southern China this year. It looks at the legacies of the Cultural Revolution in the new capitalism. An abandoned plate factory with mountainous piles of discarded china plates is ruined again as its product is crunched under foot.

Liu Xiao Xian has exhibited both nationally and internationally; his work has been collected by the National Gallery of Australia, by State Galleries and private collectors.

For more information, interviews, review or images please contact
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*The Way We Eat, 2008 – 2009* Celadon glazed porcelain, 30x120x130cm. Liu Xiao Xian
Liu Xiao Xian *From East to West* (Some additional Images from exhibition)

**Game 2008 - 2009**  
Celadon glazed porcelain, 25x45x355cm

Bronze figure: 187x62x47cm, wood carving figure: 185x55x40cm

**Lock**, 1990 (Detail)

**Home-Rome 2002-03**  
Lamda print, 120 x330cm.

**Home-Sydney 2002-03**  
Lamda print, 120 x330cm.
Liu Xiao Xian *From East to West*

*The Way We Eat*, 2008 – 2009  Celadon glazed porcelain, 30x120x130cm

*Our Gods*, 2000. (installation shot) 18 panels of lamda prints. Each image 300x300 cm.


*The Way We Eat*, 2008 – 2009  Celadon glazed porcelain, 30x120x130cm Liu Xiao Xian