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NEW WORK GORDON CHEUNG

## Gordon Cheung

"I saw stock listings as a dense metaphor... mapping the torrential streams of capital around the world"



1 **Brueghel's Highway** (2004). *Financial Times*, ink, acrylic gel, oil and gloss on canvas, 165 x 220cm

3 **Viewing the Ascent to Heaven** (2007). ink acrylic gel and spray on canvas, 76 x 122cm

3 **Trophy 7** (2008). stock listings, acrylic gel and spray on polyester, 77 x 111cm

Opposite **Living Machine (Study)** (2008). stock listings, ink, acrylic gel and spray on sail cloth, 153 x 109cm

GORDON CHEUNG creates multimedia collage paintings whose primary unifying element is the use of stock listings from the *Financial Times* newspaper as a ground. Cheung depicts artificial spaces, including epic landscapes informed by imagery including science fiction and 19th-century Romantic painting, as well as blurry, chimeric portraits of dead celebrities and cultural figures, and, in his Trophy paintings, the deer head mounts prized by hunters. With these diverse subjects, he tackles big themes; religion, consumerism, capitalism and mythology. Cheung is interested in the way we move between the physical world and the virtual realities of communications technology, global finance and the internet. His works are painted in the hallucinatory, post-apocalyptic and often lurid colours of what he describes as the "techno-sublime", which he believes has replaced traditional Romanticism. INTERVIEW: Paul Carey-Kent

**Presumably your name is Anglo-Chinese?**  
Yes, I'm a BBC (British-born Chinese). My parents were economic migrants from Hong Kong. I've heard both that my father flicked through the book at the Lambeth Register Office and found Gordon, and that he wanted something which sounded like "golden". My family name is correctly pronounced "Jerng".

**How much has that dual background influenced you?**

Quite a lot – paradoxically belonging and not belonging to both cultures has put me in an in-between state, which fits with my interest in virtual reality and the idea of existing in a technologically-driven global space.

**What first attracted you to working with finance pages?**

When I was studying at St Martins we were at the start of the digital and communication revolution of the "information superhighway", cyberspace, digital frontiers and so on – there was a utopian euphoria about what the microchip and internet would enable us to do. I saw stock listings as a dense metaphor for this, mapping the torrential streams of capital around the world. I also like the everyday, readymade aspect of the listings, and the way they bring you into the physical reality of world events when you get up close.

**Has the recession made any difference to your work?**

It has changed how other people view it – some even suggest I have predictive powers! And maybe it helped my selection for the forthcoming show for the Volta fair in New York, themed as The Age of Anxiety.

**How do you make your paintings?**

I surf the net to make image banks in categories like "mountains", "twisted trees" and "buildings". I make collages from those using Photoshop. I then print them with a big

inkjet onto prepared A1 surfaces of stock listings and then glue them to stretched sail cloth. Then I add more ink, pastels, spray paint, acrylic, gel, oils, glazes ... anything.

**Your colours can be very lurid at times.**

Yes, they can be toxic with a psychedelic and hallucinatory aspect. It's a reference to the countercultural movement, a neon glare, a nuclear sunset or drug-induced vision, or even a religious heavenly light. They're meant to be artificially luminous, a metaphor perhaps for the loss of that utopian vision of the future after the millennium bug threat, the dotcom crash, the collapse of Enron, the war on terror – and all before the current recession. Yet it's also meant to suggest glimmers of hope.

**What led you to make a set of 24 paintings on *Paradise Lost*?**

I started from John Martin's 24 illustrations [1824] to Milton's poem and was interested in drawing parallels between two systems which motivate the masses into an idea of "progress". In our secular age, what we see as omnipotent isn't perhaps a bearded guy in the clouds but the stock market which is all around us and in many ways dictates our lives.

**What about the Trophies?**

I have made work on trophy hunting tourists, who pay to kill for thrills, as a symbol of extreme consumerism. Here the trophy itself becomes a symbol of people hunting purely for prestige, power and status, and also represents our detachment from nature. The 21st century will be marked by how we try to reattach that relationship in order to survive.

**Where does the title *Wilderness of Mirrors* come from?**

James Jesus Angleton was a director of the CIA who called the world of espionage "a wilderness of mirrors" (a phrase from TS Eliot) and it refers to the labyrinth of power systems

and their underlying paranoia. The painting and title draw on the darker dimension of my overarching theme of the "techno-sublime": instead of our overwhelming experience of nature bringing us closer to God, the visual rhetoric of the Romantic sublime has changed to information which overwhelms us with an artificial landscape.

**What work are you making now?**

The *Promised Land* show in New York will include rodeo riders and also work based on the 19th-century American Sublime landscape paintings – they are inspired by the magisterial beauty of the great vistas but also they have an undercurrent of propaganda about going west and taking what God has "given" you, never mind the soaking of the land in blood on the way. Beauty, shock and awe; war on terror and political gain.

**What interests you in the rodeo?**

Lots of things ... The beast is trying to buck the human, which feels like an allegory for what is happening now in man's relationship with the environment, especially as the "sport" requires that a strap be applied to the horse or bull which causes it immense pain, hence the bucking – it's not that they're totally wild. It's also a heroic, romantic image associated with the pioneering spirit. And I like to think of the bull riders as a contemporary version of the minotaur, combining man and bull, which to me is an analogy of the financial bull market and extreme corporate being.

**Finally, if you could live with any work of art ever made, what would it be?**

Rather than have one unchanging thing, I'd like to live in a museum or a great art school and watch the full cycle of creativity.

Exhibitions: Jack Shainman Gallery, New York, 19 Mar–18 Apr; [www.jackshainman.com](http://www.jackshainman.com); Volta, New York, with Galerie Adler and Unosunove Gallery, 5–8 Mar; [www.voltashow.com](http://www.voltashow.com)

**CV** Born: 1975, London. Studied: Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, London; Royal College of Art, London. Lives and works: London. Represented: Alan Cristea, London; Galerie Adler, Frankfurt; Jack Shainman, New York; Unosunove, Rome