



*Schnitzel Company* by Ken Lum, 2004.

## STRIPPED-DOWN

By David Boyce

At 1a Space in To Ka Wan a recent show brought together three widely exhibited international artists; legendary New York artist, David Diao, Canada's Ken Lum and Hong Kong's Hiram To. What ties the artists together - apart from being ethnically Chinese, but with art practices that are not easily defined as Chinese - is a commitment to conceptual art that is firmly rooted in both theory and aesthetics. Their ideas are well thought out, with excellent realisation and presentation.

Diao's series of paintings, *Da Hen Li House*, beautifully simple and striped back to a bare, unadorned essence are minimal and modernist in appearance, and the most approachable of the works. Based on memories of the family home in Chengdu that Diao and his family left when he was six years old, the clean, uncluttered works make many references to the artist's identity and touch on what memories really are. Diao looks at his identity as an artist in the larger, international world and, deftly, acknowledges his heritage and life history.

Lum's series *Schnitzel Company* questions identity in a multicultural, multinational environment. The subjects; people of different ethnicity dressed in identical uniforms like those worn in any global food chain, are, in a way, like the artists, and could come from anywhere. The portraits, presented in a strong, graphic manner, Lum's series asks what happens to individualism in a growingly corporatised world.

Hiram To's beautifully realised, multi layered *Fortune Landscapes* pieces, referencing the first Hollywood film to be shot on location in Hong Kong, *Soldier of Fortune*, build a romanticised, idolised image of a non-existent Hong Kong. The photographs overlaid with delicate Japanese Ikebana images made me think about Western representations of a created pan-Asian ideal.

This exhibition, with its international feel, could sit in any gallery in the world and speak to any audience. This was not contemporary Chinese art as we have come to know it, but one that is more rounded and far less didactic.

***One Suitcase Per Person* at 1a Space ran from 24 November 2011 to 31 January 2012.**