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Matt Sesow paints in China during july 2008

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The Examiner
Washington
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THURSDAY
SEPTEMBER 4, 2008

Made in China: Travelogue, uncensored

By Robin Tierney
Special to The Examiner

"Where in the world is Matt Sesow?" would make an amusing game.

One day, the D.C.-based extremo expressionist is in North Carolina, painting spontaneously, side-stage, to a live opera performance of "Don Giovanni."

Soon, he's jetting to San Francisco to paint the set for a play, "All You Can Eat."

Most of July, he painted his way through China with his parents and fellow artist Dana Ellyn. They found supplies along the way, as well as inspirations from acrobats to "all kinds of communists."

"I really enjoy being with my parents, so taking time away from them to paint was very difficult," Sesow said.

"I rectified this situation by sketching some of my paintings using pen and ink while hanging out with them in bars and on the deck of ships, in buses. ... Dana and I had to forgo sleep and food sometimes just so we could work on the paintings."

Selections from the duo's visual travelogue now fill Long View Gallery. Sesow's graphic accounts erupt with frenzy, distress, dissent, incredulity.

There are rope-walks between exhilaration and hysteria, observations conscious and subconscious of a vast morass of myriad traditions colliding with breakneck modernization.

Sesow interprets the painting, "Made in China": "I bought some playing cards with [various images] of Mao ... I noticed the prominence of his wave, his hand."

Sesow then imagined how his own painting hand might have been figuratively severed had he lived in China. The bunny rabbits at the bottom represent the innocent, marginalized Chinese people who've endured lifelong struggles.

"When you ride alone, you ride with Mao" — is a self-portrait as "the American tourist riding through Tiananmen Square on a chicken with a panda hat."

Chickens and hats are among Sesow metaphorica.

"It is the way we felt when people would ask to take our pictures. Some of the people had traveled from rural villages and never seen 'Westerners,' " Sesow said. The title nods to a World War II propaganda poster that likened gas-wasting solo automobile trips to "riding with Hitler."



COURTESY PHOTO
A Matt Sesow painting from the "Made in China" exhibition

IF YOU GO

'Made in China'
Through Sept. 20

» **WHERE:** Long View Gallery; 1302 9th St. NW
» **COST:** Free
» **INFORMATION:** 202-232-4788; longviewgallery.com

Sesow flash-freezes the shock of events through his raw figures' facial expressions and body language. Bright colors and large, animated forms both hulking and diminutive render even primal scream scenes approachable; the Matt-osphere is tumultuous, but not forbidding.

With the trip to China, Sesow is making good on his goal to have painted in every continent.

"I only have Antarctica to go," he said.

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Courtesy Photo

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"Made in China"
Longview Gallery DC
July 2008

City Paper "Critic's Pick", Wash. Post, etc..
See paintings and PRESS reviews here

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