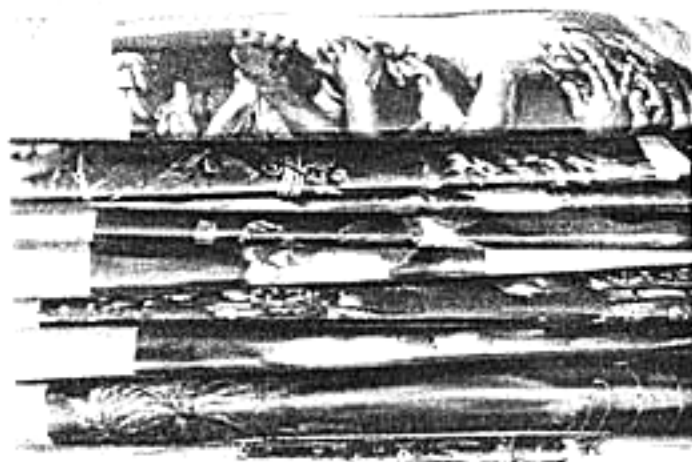


# Fish Wrap, Bird Cage Liner, Still Life

By TED LOOS



*Xiaoze Xie's paintings of stacked newspapers include "March-April, 2003, L.T." (The Times of London), above, and "March 2003, S.J.M.N." (The San Jose Mercury News).*



palm trees. The staccato burst of images gives the painting a kind of jazzy rhythm.

Some of the more elliptical works get their power from almost surrealist juxtapositions. "November-December 2001, A.J.C." (a stack of Atlanta Journal-Constitutions), Attorney General John Ashcroft's head floats above the word "Inside" and near a sliver of a photograph showing soldiers running across an Afghan desert. "I want to draw viewers' attention to the fact that what we are getting may not be the whole picture," Mr. Xie said.

## Xiaoze Xie

Charles Cowles Gallery,  
537 West 24th Street. Through April 10.

Born in China's Guangdong Province, Mr. Xie studied architecture and painting in Beijing in the late 1980's. The Tiananmen Square crackdown in 1989 gave him a topic to explore artistically. "I think the overriding theme in my work is a concern about power and its abuses, and violence," he said.

In 1993 he moved to Denton, Tex., with his wife, Daxue Xu, who had a scholarship to the University of North Texas. (Ms. Xu, an engineer, lives in Los Angeles with their two young sons. Mr. Xie visits them once a month.) Mr. Xie studied contemporary art at the university, earning a master's degree. In 1998 he made his first newspaper painting, but it was largely abstract, with no readable images. The following year he began to teach at Bucknell University here and his work started to comment more sharply on world events.

"Then 9/11 happened," Mr. Xie said. "All of a sudden I had this sense of urgency."

Despite the avalanche of violent words and images in subsequent newspapers, Mr. Xie never changed his methodical, deliberate approach to painting. It takes him two to six weeks to complete a picture. To keep his work from becoming static, he uses a layer of bright red underpainting, which shows through in tiny areas of each canvas. "It makes the paintings glow," he said.

Mr. Xie also shies away from photo-realism, favoring a more expressive style: you can read the words on the papers, but you can also see his brush strokes. Like slightly distorted memories, the paintings are more vivid than the original subjects.

"When I was in China, my fellow students and I felt that art should be for art's sake," Mr. Xie said. "We'd seen a lot of bad critical art for so long. Now I've changed my theory on that. Art should carry some message. But, of course, it has to be beautiful, too."

LEWISBURG, Pa.  
ACCORDING to the old saw, yesterday's newspapers are only good for wrapping fish and lining birdcages. But don't tell that to Xiaoze Xie (pronounced SHOUT-zeh SHE-ay), who makes paintings of stacks of newspapers that are months, or even years, old. He finds them filed away in libraries, photographs them and carefully reproduces them, creating new contexts for the news flashes that can be read along their fat folds. He calls the results "amplified moments."

His latest paintings, of which seven are on view at the Charles Cowles Gallery in Chelsea until April 10, are packed with the finely wrought details of classic still lifes, but get their punch from their true subjects: war and terrorism. All touch on the fighting in Iraq or the hunt for Osama bin Laden in the wake of 9/11.

Mr. Xie, 37, is soft-spoken and doesn't rush into explaining his work, which can be as large as 5 by 8 feet. "There are just suggestions of narrative," he said recently in his studio here, lined with stacks of newspapers he keeps around for reference. "They are less about specific events than the way we perceive the world today."

By stripping the subject of its context — an approach common to Conceptual artists — he wants to force the viewer to look again, to do a double take. In one of the new works, "March-April 2003, L.T.," the top issue of The Times of London shows part of a large and dramatic picture of outstretched hands. "It is hands of the Iraqis reaching out for relief materials," Mr. Xie said. "For me, it's a strong image about suffering."

Below it, in other issues of the paper, more shards of war are laid on top of one another: guns, soldiers, a fireball and a plume of black smoke rolling over a row of

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