



REVIEW

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The Art World's 'Where's Waldo?'

CHINESE ARTIST Liu Bolin disappears inside his works.

Mr. Liu, a master of camouflage, has his clothes, shoes, face and hands painted to match the settings behind him so that he all but vanishes against the backdrops of his photographs. The faint outlines of Mr. Liu can be spotted along the Great Wall of China, a dusty piece of construction equipment, a Chinese temple, a pile of logs and a red velvet seat, among other places.

These days, it's getting tougher for Mr. Liu to hide. Last month, he was the fourth most searched among contemporary and modern artists on the site Artnet, beating Damien Hirst and Jeff Koons. (The American photographer Sally Mann came in first.) Next week, Mr. Liu will draw attention in New York, where he's creating portraits at sites that include a magazine rack, a Kenny Scharf graffiti mural on Houston Street and a spot at ground zero.

A solo exhibition of Mr. Liu's work, featuring his hidden portraits from Beijing and Italy, will open June 29 at the New York gallery Eli Klein Fine Art. The photos may strike some as a high-culture version of "Where's Waldo?" But the image of a concealed artist may hold more meaning for others, especially amid the art-world outcry over the Chinese government's detention of artist-activist Ai Weiwei.

Mr. Liu, 38 years old, grew up along the Yellow River in Shandong province; his parents worked in flood control. He created his first hidden photo in 2005, posing against a wall of his artist's village, which the government had plans to



Eli Klein Fine Art

LIU BOLIN makes a camouflaged appearance in his 'Dragon Series' photos.

demolish.

To create many of his works, he poses for a preliminary photo to figure out his position against the backdrop. He's dressed in Chinese army fatigues with gel on his skin to protect him from the paint. His assistants then render the scene on top of him, so he fits into the picture like a piece in a jigsaw puzzle.

"My work is for me to stand still there," Mr. Liu said in an email translated by the gallery. Later, he added: "In those moments, I feel like I am fighting against my nature, fighting with life, and

I have to stand in stillness for my faith and ideals." (In last year's "Jackass 3D," a bull charges Johnny Knoxville, who's painted into a rainbow mural. The actor has said the painting was inspired by Mr. Liu.)

His photos are sold in limited editions for \$6,000 to \$12,000—about 30% higher than a few years ago, according to gallery owner Eli Klein.

Not everything is for sale, though. When the work is done, Mr. Liu folds his painted clothes and keeps them as a memento.

—Ellen Gamerman