

Review by Patricia Karetzky

Zhang Dali at Eli Klein Fine Art

<http://www.elikleinfineart.com/html/exhibinfo.asp?exnum=734>

462 West Broadway NY NY 10012

April 4th – May 8th

Zhang Dali has a show in Soho, *New Slogan*, which is a further development in his painting series AK47. Zhang first won acclaim as a graffiti artist who from 1995-1998 secretly spray painted his profile on 2000 buildings slated for destruction in Beijing. A form of social protest, it remonstrated the government's policy of tearing down the old buildings and neighborhoods (hutong) in favor of western style shopping malls and apartment



Zhang Dali: New Slogan

complexes. This series, whose origins date back nearly a decade, takes homeless rural migrants living on the margins of society as the subject of large-scale portraits painted on vinyl. The monochrome images are exacting close-up and frontal depictions that have the immediacy of portraits, or more likely mug shots, that commemorate the unknown denizens of the city. In the early version of the series, Zhang painted over the images a veil of block printed letters –AK47– that looks, in the uniformity and repetition of the motif, like a written page of text. The phrase AK47, also one of his monikers, is a protest of world violence. From a distance, the paintings seem like skilled portraits, it is only up close that the tension between the graphic surface design and image is appreciable. *New Slogan*, which also uses using migrant workers as models differs in the text that covers the image: the veil is now comprised of slogans from the Cultural Revolution sometimes in Chinese: “Practicing good manners leads to a beautiful life” or “Promote Socialism and the construction of a harmonious society”. The intimations of the series are deep and layered ranging from a remonstrance of the urban social problems of homelessness and the manipulation of a society denied freedom of expression, and more.