

# Expressions: Artists' work examines government repression

hibition material, is part of the process of cultural redefinition and self-reflection.

Gu Xiong, a professor at the University of British Columbia and expatriate of China, said it was very hard to be a contemporary artist in China.

"I joined the students' movement," he said. "Then we were hopeful, before Tian'anmen Square. I finally discovered I couldn't believe in the government anymore. The government there only represents the government."

Wen-Li Tu, president of the University's Chinese Student Association, visited China over winter break. While there, she saw incidents of the oppression Xiong had witnessed during the late 1980s.

Xiong described art exhibits open for less than 30 days at underground locations that were forced to close as a result of government censorship. Tu said the government claims to be open-minded but acts in a completely opposite manner.

"[The government] tries to be very liberal," she said. "But their liberalism is still following the rules of the government. So, maybe to an outsider of the West they can say, 'OK, we're opening the gates,' but actually everybody still has to follow the rules."

Many of the works presented in "New Art in China" display the government's role in art.

During the Mao-era's Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976, art was meant only to "serve the masses," according to exhibit material. "Official art" consisted of brightly colored propaganda in support of the government.

Following Mao's death in 1976, the new Chinese leader, Deng Xiaoping, began reestablishing open lines of communication with the West. This new influence inspired Chinese artists to pursue and diversify their contemporary styles.

The Tian'anmen Square massacre later influenced artists to an even greater extent, and the tragedy of their cultural climate pervades their art.

This exhibit, one of the largest in the University's recent history, has just embarked on an international tour, Laura Aaron Sear said. The University is only its second stop and its first American showing.

"Getting this exhibition was kind of serendipity," Sear said. "It's actually kind of a coup for us because it's such a big exhibit."

The University had to edit the works presented because the exhibition is so large. The display originally included 84 works by 31 artists, Sear said.

However, because of space constraints, faculty members had to cut the display down to 64 works with the approval of the American Federation of Arts, while still representing each of the 31 artists.

The exhibition has met mixed responses. A comment board posted in the museum reflects the varying opinions of museum-goers. Comments ranging from "Nice exhibit! Very profound messages!" to "Is this what art has come to?" flank the board.

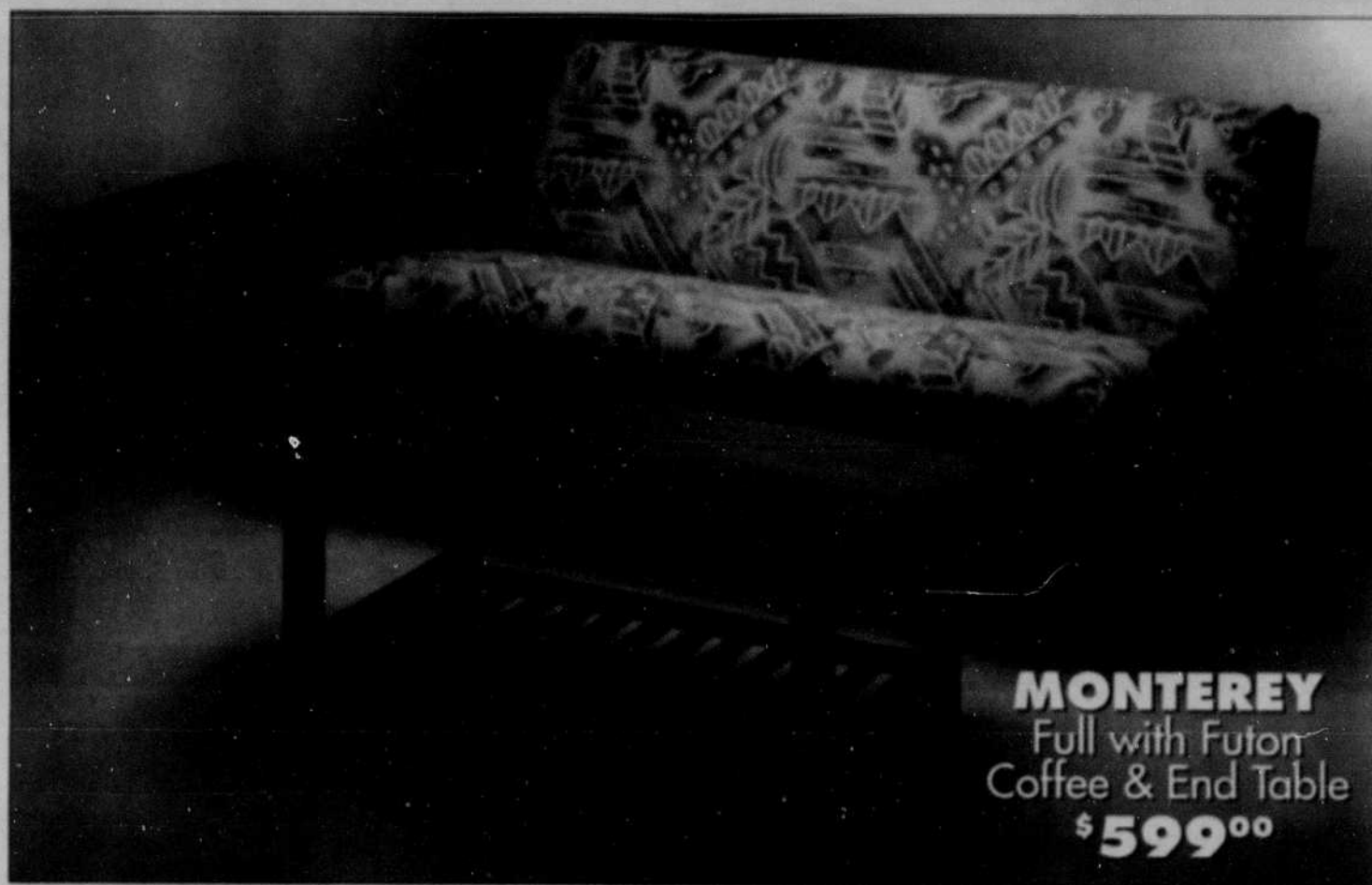
"We want to start a dialogue," Sear said. "The exhibition is so diverse. There are so many kinds of work here that people can respond to. We want to hear the responses and be able to share them."

"New Art in China, Post-1989," is here through Feb. 18 and is free and open to the public. Special events scheduled in conjunction with the exhibit will take place in the coming weeks. A reception will take place today from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Anne Moser-Kornfeld contributed to this story.

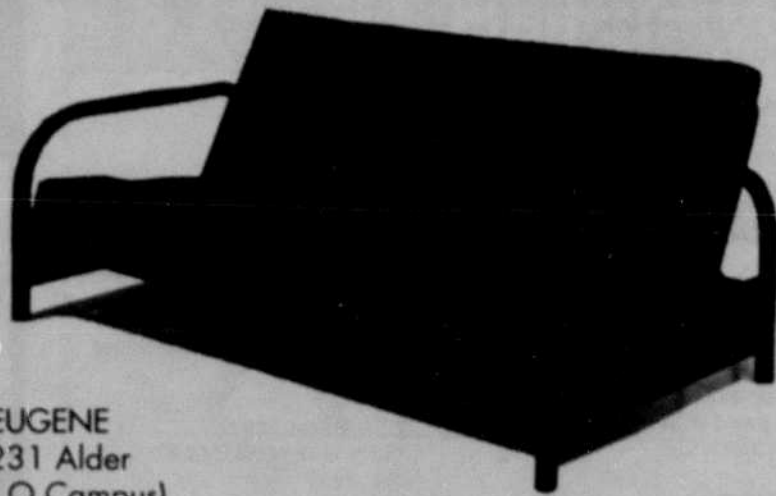
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