



**PREVIEW**  
6.00 – 8.00PM TUESDAY 2 OCTOBER 2007  
EXHIBITION TO BE OPENED BY TBC

**EXHIBITION DATES**  
2 – 27 OCTOBER 2007

**ARC**  
one gallery

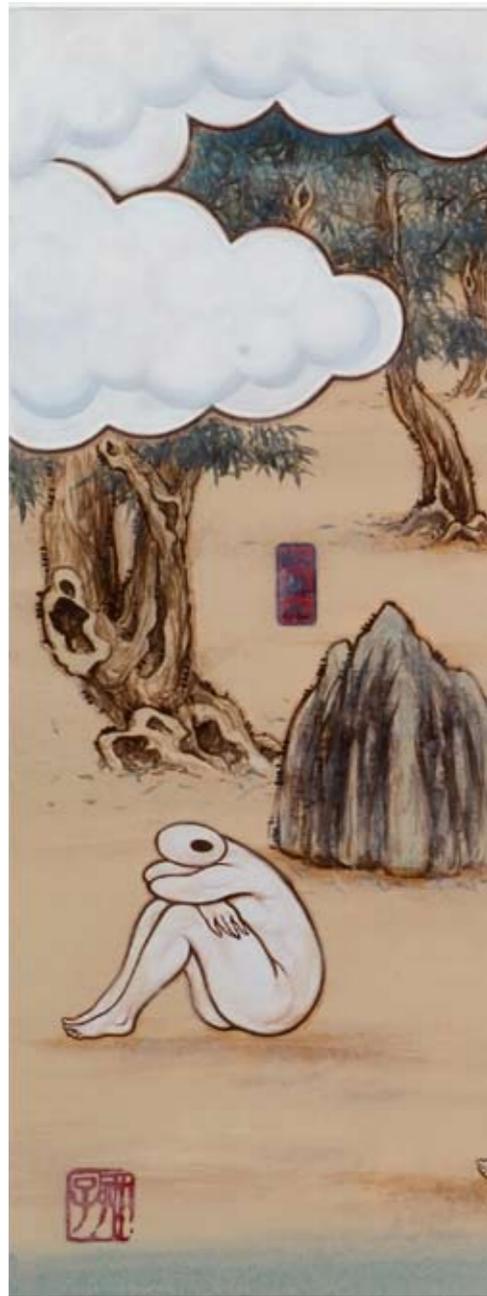
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**GIANT STEPS**  
— SEXTON —  
YARRA VALLEY, AUSTRALIA

# GUAN WEI A MYSTERIOUS LAND



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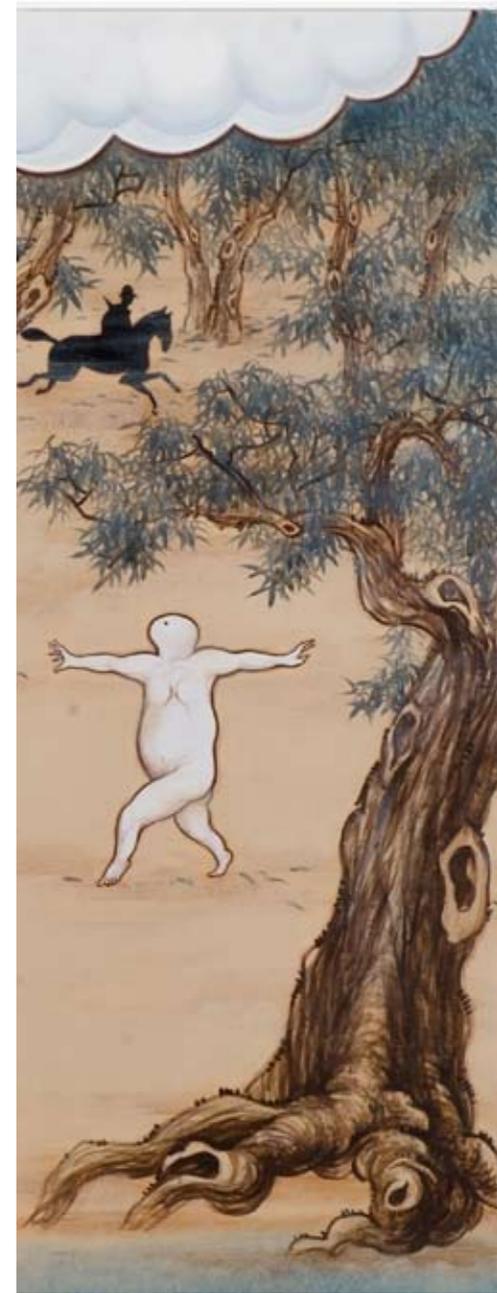


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GUAN WEI  
 A MYSTERIOUS LAND

## A MYSTERIOUS LAND

I first set foot on Australian soil in 1989, 18 years ago. Since then, I have lived and worked continuously in a coastal Australian city and, over this time, have developed a reasonable understanding of major elements that make up Australia's culture, including its colonial and migrant cultures. I have, however, only a feeling of curiosity, mystery and strangeness about aboriginal culture and the way in which the original inhabitants of this land once lived. In 2006, the 24 Hour Art Gallery in Darwin organised an art camp where five artists with migrant backgrounds and five local indigenous artists were invited to go deep into aboriginal territory and live outdoors, working together and exchanging ideas. This left a profound impression on me and led me to create this *A Mysterious Land* series.

Our camp was in a grove, my tent underneath a crooked tree. I had great difficulty finding sleep on the first night. The sound of the wind, the water and the birds, intermingled from time to time with strange cries coming from I-do-not-know-what-kind-of animals, made me feel extremely restless. Yet when I got up to look at the vast expanse of the star canopy, it also caused me to feel extremely excited. This was the first time since my arrival in Australia that I had experienced the great outdoors and come so closely into contact with the wilderness. It filled me both with fear and with a feeling of awe before nature.

On the second day, I took a walk on my own into the surrounding darksome and hazy woods. I was terrified. I felt that a kangaroo or some other animal was watching my every move from behind each tree, that this dense and deep forest could hide creatures like Pan, the half-man, half-goat god from Greek mythology who would frighten people with his screams. The formidable force exuding from this wilderness whetted my curiosity and filled me with excitement. It made me think of Australia in colonial times, when forests and plains were often depicted as harsh, savage, cruel and deserted places where solitary white men would certainly die. Australia was rarely seen as the setting of a rich aboriginal history and stories.

During the three weeks that I spent in the camp, I got a sense of the rhythm of the day, from sunrise to sunset. I could tell when mosquitos and flies would come and go. I even became able to identify the various birdcalls I heard in the middle of the night. In the last few days, I was able to sense my own body and mind in harmony with nature. I worked during the day and was able to find sweet sleep at night without the tenseness and restlessness of the first days.

During these three weeks, I worked everyday with aboriginal artists, talking intently with them and examining their paintings. Of particular interest was the visit we made to an aboriginal sacred mountain where I saw magnificent cliff paintings left there in ancient times. These activities enriched my understanding of aboriginal culture and visual arts.

What impressed me deeply was their intimate connection with nature: a rock formation, a tree, a stretch of water can all form the subject of a moving story. The indigenous inhabitants of this country understand, respect and worship nature; they work and rest in nature. I was also impressed by the way they look upon nature - they believe all living things are endowed with intelligence, just like people, and that people and all living creatures exist in harmonious symbiosis. They use the inspiration they draw from nature to express their 'dreaming' through drawings, paintings and stories that they share among themselves and pass on from generation to generation. There is a deep-seated and rich culture.

What particularly interests me here are the similarities between aboriginal culture and the Taoist philosophy of ancient China. According to Taoist philosophy, all living things have a spirit, heaven and mankind merge into one, and the great universe of nature and the smaller universe of man must find unity if people are to live harmoniously in the world.

In this series of works entitled *A Mysterious Land*, I have attempted to combine the essence of both aboriginal culture and ancient Chinese philosophy using an "oriental" background and my eighteen-year experience of the Australian land. In this way, I hope to create work presenting a new vision. It contains a peaceful Australian forest, the yellow land of Darwin, huge ant hills, Australian animals and elongated white clouds, to which I have added a few Chinese elements such as mythological creatures and seal stamps. My intention is to represent the mystery, the sheer beauty of the forest and the great forces of nature that hold us in awe and feed our reveries. Through this work, I want to reveal the disharmonious relationship between nature and us, now living in a highly urbanised world, in order that people might reacquaint themselves with nature, embrace nature, and even return to nature.

### Guan Wei, 2007

**reverse**  
*A Mysterious Land, No.8, 2007*  
acrylic on canvas  
330cm x 130cm (6 panels)

**right**  
*A Mysterious Land, No.12, 2007*  
acrylic on canvas  
106cm x 130cm (2 panels)

