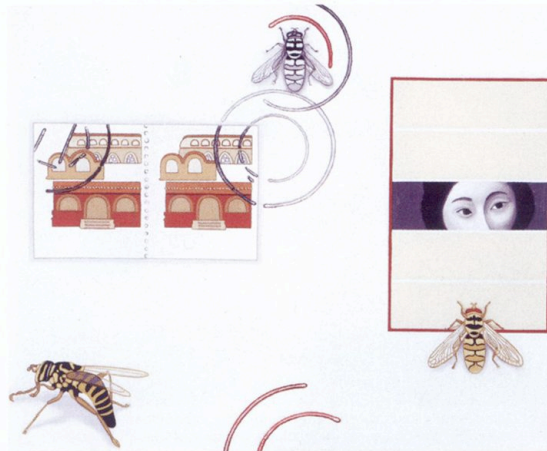


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Art in America



Li-lan: *Look Out*, 2004, oil on linen, 24 by 30 inches; at Jason McCoy.

Li-lan at Jason McCoy

For some time now, the painter Li-lan has engaged in a whimsical exploration of imagery related to postal correspondence. Letters, postcards, stamps and cancellation marks make up a vision of international communications that is not so much exotic as charmingly lyrical. Li-lan's image repertoire comes from all over the world, her effort to propose, one suspects, the interrelatedness of cultures. Her subjects are both space and time, in the sense that she includes architecture and other artifacts as examples of a civilization's passing achievements.

In *Bird of Minerva* (2004), a wonderful mix of sparsely rendered images captures the viewer's interest. The largish (54-by-42 inch) oil on linen shows three tiny airplanes at the upper left and big airmail envelopes sliding down through the composition from the upper-right corner to the lower edge. Near the center of the piece is a cartoonish jet emerging from a cloud, while beneath it, at the lower right, is a pair of owls, taken from a Chinese stamp. At the very bottom right, where a signature might be, are four Chinese characters that translate as "Chinese

stamp." The painting refers to travel and distant relations: Li-lan, who is part Chinese, may well be connecting with her Asian background.

One can see how, in the oil *Look Out* (2004), Li-lan more explicitly personalizes her painting by including, at the right, a self-portrait executed in black and white, in a thin strip only partially revealing her face—her eyes, hair and part of her nose. Still, Li-lan's presence is no small part of the picture, which also includes canceled stamps and bees suggestive of passage from one point to another.

Legend (2005), another oil on linen, is composed of disparate objects separated by empty white stretches. In the center one finds an arched building; to the left is a manila envelope drawn in outline; and on the right a reclining, downward tilted female figure, also in outline, her knees raised above her body. Li-lan asks us to make sense of this seemingly random accumulation, to piece together the parts of her poetic vision. She extends her vision to many cultures, making her work a powerful metaphor for what it means to live in our globalized era.

—Jonathan Goodman