

# Imke Rust's 'Made in China' at Omba Gallery next Tuesday

Who would think of a high-quality art exhibition when confronted with one of the world's most recognisable and suggestive commercial labels 'Made in China'? And yet the well-known Namibian artist Imke Rust hits the mark with her solo exhibition running from next Tuesday until August 16 at the Bank Windhoek Omba Gallery with this title.

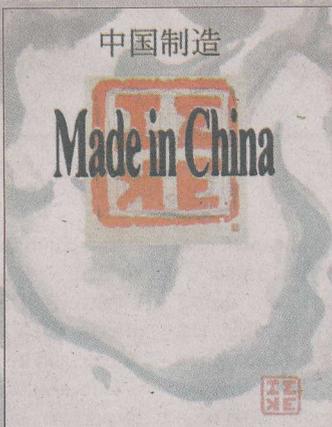
The exhibition consists of works produced in China with traditional Chinese art materials. Imke provocatively challenges our preconceived notions and stereotypes about China. She presents us with yet another chapter of her art-making that incorporates several of her established key themes, such as the analysis of the human psyche and relationships, but expressed in refreshing and innovative ways inspired by her stay in China.

Curious about the old Chinese art tradition as well as its favourable reputation in the international art market, Imke accepted the invitation of her friend and artist, Torsten Jurell from Sweden to share a studio in Beijing, China in 2008. For three weeks they worked together in the Beijing International Art Camp, which houses 100 art studios occupied mostly by Chinese artists.

Coping with everyday life in a foreign culture where almost nobody spoke English served as a profound inspiration for a whole new body of work for the Namibian artist. Imke realised that when language fails, one quickly has to find new ways of communicating, either

by body language, intuition, pictures or by minimising expectations, needs and communications to the absolute essential. This might be frustrating, but once accepted it can also be very liberating and infuses life with a special freedom and lightness.

Immersing herself into this new experience by learning to work with



traditional Chinese art media such as Chinese inks and water-colours on rice paper, she found that art is an excellent medium to express her experience and communicate in a non-verbal way in order to bridge over cultural and language barriers.

Long-time fans will once again appreciate Imke's continuous exploration of the human spirit and personal relationships in her decidedly unique and thought-provoking way. What is new is that the works seem more light-hearted

and sometimes move into the abstract, reflecting Imke's experiences and feelings while in China. The fact that all the works have been produced in China gives it a special sense of rarity.

There is a strong play between literal and abstract expression and meaning, for instance in the series 'Dragon Looking for Love', where an image of a friendly, imaginary dragon represents the physical outline of the People's Republic of China. In contrast to European and African mythology where the dragon is considered evil, Chinese dragons traditionally symbolise potent and auspicious powers along with imperial authority. Similarly in Namibia and the Western world, China is often viewed as the new colonial threat and danger, while China perceives itself as friend and helper.

Imke works with these different perspectives and considers how often this can lead to misunderstandings and violence. This body of work suggests that if we see into the heart of each other and past the politics, we realise that humans and all living beings are united by the same basic needs and desires, like the need to love and be loved.

'Made in China' offers a personal perspective of the artist's experience of China, while engaging with a socially relevant theme in a time where Namibian perception of China is emotionally charged and divided. The exhibition will be opened by Wiebke Volkmann of Earth Wise Enterprise.