



*Day after tomorrow no. 5, 2007*  
synthetic polymer paint on canvas

La Trobe University, Geoff Raby Collection of Chinese Art.  
Donated by Dr Geoff Raby AO through the Australian  
Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2019. © Guan Wei.  
Courtesy the artist, ARC ONE Gallery and Martin Browne  
Fine Art. Photo: Jia De

Guan Wei's *Day after tomorrow no. 5* comprises two painted panels that make up a map-like composition depicting images of land, sea and clouds. Disparate stories are depicted across the canvas, which at first glance creates an impulse to discern the composition as a single narrative. At the centre of the work, a pile of pink bodies struggles to stay afloat on a sinking boat, with the threat of a fish god only a heartbeat away. This scene reminds us of the bodily experience of migration, travelling across water, and its relations to the political and ongoing debates around immigration and refugees. The composition of the work also invites us to imagine spaces beyond its frame: what extends past the canvas and what narratives and futures lie ahead?

Having migrated to Australia in 1989, Guan Wei uses his work to explore the idea of encounters and what it means to be a Chinese Australian (and by extension Asian Australian) in changing times. In this work, the artist incorporates Chinese texts and motifs alongside depictions of an Australian land that is inhabited by a walking dinosaur-like kangaroo and Indigenous dancers.

Each of the mountains depicted in the painting is marked with a red, rectangular seal. The upper-left seal reads 'bull mountain'. In Chinese beliefs the bull, related to farming and agriculture, is a symbol of diligence, perseverance and wealth. The upper-right seal reads 'sheep mountain', with sheep having an auspicious meaning of prosperity and promise. Finally, the lower red seal reads 'dragon mountain'. In Chinese beliefs, dragons represent great power and strength. Combined, these reflect experiences and intentions of migration: the promise of a better future, finding greater power and perseverance. But these red seals are dispersed and therefore cannot be conquered in one place, suggesting the impossibility of 'having it all'.

Bianca Winataputri, 2022