

# BLISS

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Liu Bolin

# Liu Bolin

Interview: Liz Rice McCray

From the start of time, animals and people have used devices to camouflage into their surrounding environment in order to avoid danger or predators. Liu Bolin has perfected the ability to imitate and disappear into settings by matching the colors, lighting, textures, and his alignments to fit perfectly within an atmosphere. Bolin's art encourages people to take a better look at their relationship with the "environment" and the surroundings that are lived and interacted in. In today's world an individual can easily be influenced or controlled by their environment; the effects can be small or big, sometimes the changes are never noticed until under a microscope. Liu Bolin is an anomaly and a mystery; his work is a true testament to his artistry. After some searching (actually, a bunch of searching) we were pleased to be able to track down Liu and ask him a couple questions... Thank you so much to Eli Klein Fin Art for making this interview possible, for the images and translations. Thank you Liu Bolin for taking the time to give us a little insight to you and your work - I found you to be a complete inspiration.

**To start will you please introduce yourself to our readers?**  
Hi everyone, I'm Liu Bolin. I was born in 1973 in Binzhou in Shandong Province, China - the city is the last pit stop before the Yellow River drains into the sea. From a young age I was subject to a rigorous and traditional Chinese education. Having loved art since I was little, I started studying it in 1985 and graduated from Shandong University of Arts in 1995. In 2001, I graduated with my MFA in sculpture from the Central Academy of Fine Arts. I quit my teaching job in 2005 in order to focus on my own creative art practice.

**You are originally from China - is that where you are currently living? Are you married?**  
Currently, I'm very happily living with my wife and working at Beijing 798 Art District.

**What do your parents think about your art? Are they supportive? If so have they always been supportive?**  
Initially, my parents didn't want me to study art because it was not a widely accepted career tract according to traditional Chinese sensibilities. It was fine as a hobby, but not practical as a career, nor was it regarded as a reliable way to build and feed a family. However, I was resolute about continuing on this path. At first, my parents were absolutely against the idea of me studying art. I remember distinctly when they threw my color palette on the floor with such force that the paint splashed all over the ceiling, creating beautiful bursts of color. Despite my parents' resistance, I persevered in following my own dream and pursuing my studies without knowing the outcome of where it was all going to take me. All this because I truly love art.

**What were you doing before "Hiding in the City"?**  
I studied sculpture all throughout college and graduate school, so my works prior to "Hiding in the City" were predominantly sculptures, interspersed with some oil paintings. From 1994 to 1999, before going to the Central Academy of Fine Arts, I filled up 44 books with sketches and artistic notes. Although these were by no means artistic masterpieces, they did imbibe me with a deep reverence for the modernism movement. In 1998, I started creating pieces showcasing distorted human figures that broke away from the educational curriculum. At this point, my thinking process moved away from the mimicry of art that was created in the past to considerations about materials and Chinese symbolism. In 1999, during the time when I was studying sculpture in the Central Academy of Fine Arts, I gained exposure to metal welding and the art of creating something out of raw materials. However, at this point, my works were still amateur and imitative. In 2001, the experience of leaving school and stepping into the ranks of the working society finally allowed me to invest my vision into the social strata. At this time, my knowledge and understanding about society slowly transitioned into my own creative methodology.





**Am I correct to say that you started these pieces as a political statement to the Chinese government? Will you elaborate and give us some background to the political commentary?**

First, I have to make an explanation about the strong political elements. I should say: because the environment where I live is filled with political elements, it makes the work very political. Because I live in a place like this, I want to use it and show it in my work.

I agree with those who say art can make a positive effect on the development of society, because art in this modern life means that through all the meditations and doubts of the work, to remain clear about the situation we live in. I also want to use my works to remind people to take attention about what kind of environment they live in.

When I began work on "Hiding in the City", the artists' studio was forcibly demolished. This made my works filled with elements of doubt about society, and fighting with fate, and it made my

works have a kind of temperament of insurgency. Later, you will find there are some slogans in my works, such as One Family, Demolition, Red Flag... also from the environment I began creating my works in.

**If you had to put into words - how would you explain your art?**

I'm trying to deliver a message about the relationship of human beings to their environment. "Environment" here can mean social, cultural, ecological, and so on. An individual today is more likely to be controlled by or even merged into their environment. Of course, a lot of people and the media speak about my work from a political perspective, which is one aspect of my message for sure. But I also want to emphasize and to draw people's attention to the relationship between the grand scale of cultural development and the role of a single individual.

In the Chinese society's collectivistic dream, there must be majuscules (capital letters/big words) to tell and to clean the public's brain, creating the

kind of people we need. For example: some uniform thoughts and promotion of the educational ideas were written as slogans on the wall, which were written in majuscules. This is a way to fool the public, and the people who gained a lot were the people who created those slogans. My body chose to be covered or disappeared, that's not the relationship between me and the wall, but the relationship between me as an "individual" and those slogans which are used to fool the public. In China, we get used to those slogans, we never feel surprised when we see some slogans, so I want to use my works to remind people they have to think more about the environment where we live.

**How long does it take to do one photo? What is your start to finish process in making each photo complete? You have assistants that paint you? How do they know where to paint? Do you speak with your assistants while they paint on you or are you quiet?**

To finish one work, it will take 3-4 hours. First, I choose the location and site of my work and the position of camera. The painting work and photography are finished by my assistants. Some people would ask, "You are not the one who does the painting or shoot the work so how can it be your work?" But the conception and message is my own. During the shot, my job is to stand still there. Before we start work, I take a photo of me standing in front

of the site. I put my portrait on every background digitally before real production starts, in order to show my assistant the ideas and tell them how to proceed. We pay attention to every single detail, every line and color. My assistant and I communicate throughout the process, in order to get the best image we can. I then analyze which part is the most important part, which has to be finished first, and also I need to guide them to make the color choices so it is the same as the background. Then we start to paint. I have to be painted as the same color as the background, and more importantly I have to make the lines connect with those of the background.

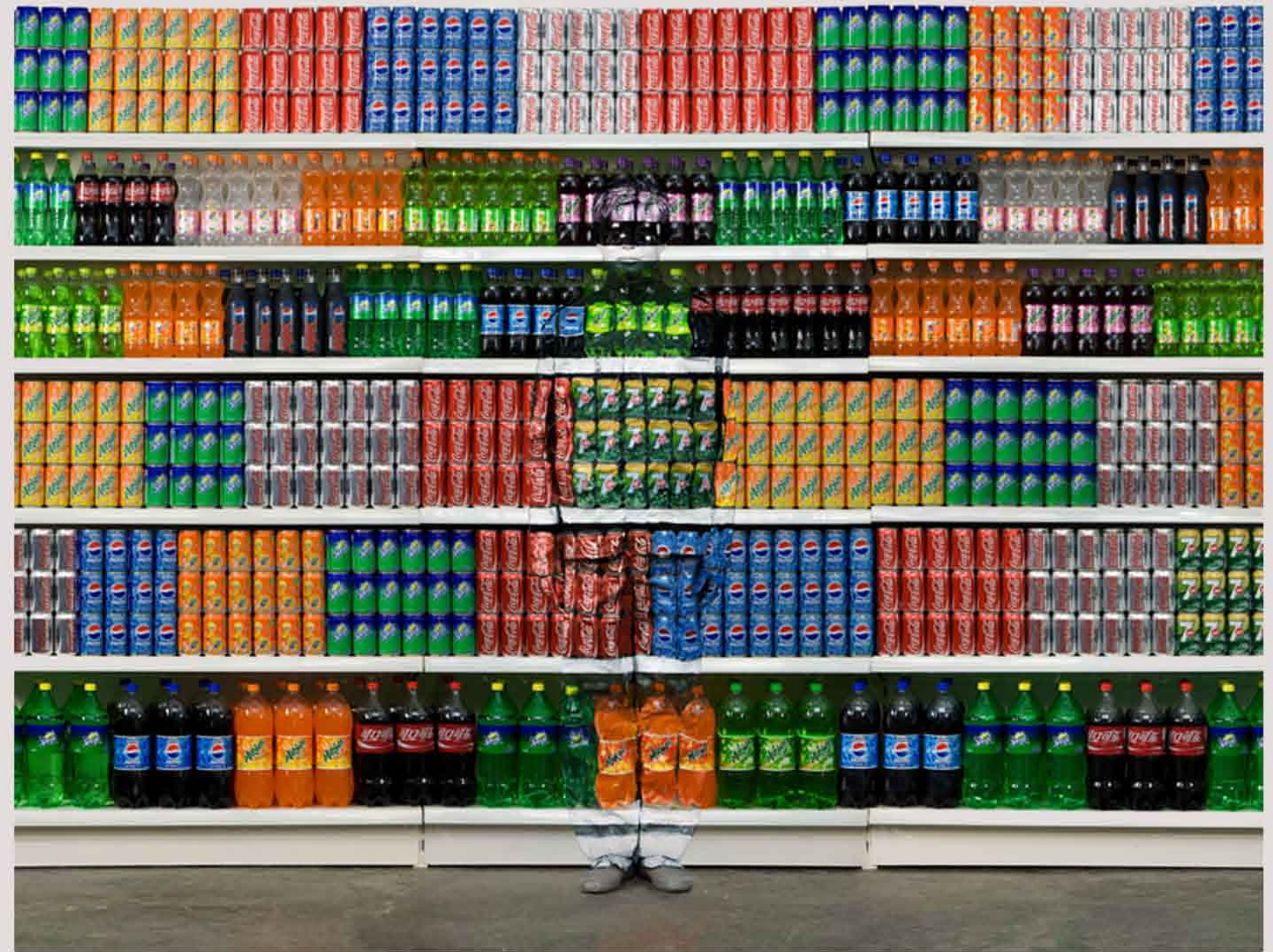
**What was your most time consuming photo?**

"Hiding in the City" No.1 was my most time consuming work. I stood for an entire day. I was lacking in experience back then. I didn't know the first thing about selecting the right angle, background, and lighting. Although this piece has never been on public display, it has made the most impression on me and I consider it to be my most meaningful work.

**Do you have a favorite environment that you have painted yourself into?**

The power of the background acts as the language for my artwork itself, so picking the right background is of the utmost importance. *Supermarket* is my favorite out of all my works. Spotting my body in this piece is the most difficult; at the same time, the colors are very beautiful.





**Tell us about your current show "The Invisible Man," at Eli Klein Fine Art Gallery.**  
 I want to say thanks to Eli, because he is helping me to show my work at EKFA again, so I have this chance to get in touch with Americans. I am so happy to have more Americans see my work. I will work harder to create better work to thank the people who have paid so much attention so far.

**How did you get involved with the Eli Klein Fine Art gallery?**  
 It has been more than three years since I first came in contact with Eli Klein Fine Art. A friend introduced me to Eli Klein, and I had a solo show at his gallery in April, 2008, and this was the first time my work has been shown in New York City. Eli is a really good friend. I appreciate his capabilities, and I am also thankful for his continued support for my creative projects as well as his help for marketing my work.

**What is your average Monday look like?**  
 Monday is the beginning of my workweek. I plan all the work that needs to be completed over the course of the next seven days.

**What has been your biggest struggle as an artist?**  
 In China, if you choose to be an artist, you have chosen paints and loneliness. As an artist, there is no position for you, and you have to face one day you will have nothing. In China, if you want to do performance art, there is no other choice. You have nothing beside your own body. Your body is the last card in your hands. So I have to have a strong mind to work as I do.

**What has been your biggest accomplishment as an artist?**  
 As an artist, the ideal situation would be to produce artwork as I envisioned it to be according to my own specifications, and then

being able to exhibit these works in a solo show in the finest museums. The works can then gain recognition and acceptance from a large body of people, and simultaneously pass on insight to future generations.

**When it is all said and done how would you like to be remembered?**  
 I would like to be remembered for my works from "Hiding in the City." I recorded all the shortcomings and imbalances I felt were evident in the development of human civilization. However, my works merely recorded, they did not create. I hope to create artwork that will affect future generations. I hope that after the unveiling of my new work, people will forget about my "Hiding in the City" series as the new work will definitely surpass my current work.

**Will you tell us something about yourself that not many people would know?**  
 I have a lovely family. My loved ones play a critical role in my career development. I want to utter a public proclamation: I love my wife. I hope to use my hard work to provide her with happiness.

**What projects do you have coming up?**  
 Next year is the Year of the Dragon and straight away I will carry out my plan. I want to complete work and ideas which I had started ten years ago but was unable to finish. Now I feel I am a little better, and because the idea is inspired by the traditional Chinese dragon, it will be appropriate to start next year. I will wait until I have completed my first test of this work before I reveal to everyone the concrete details of the piece.

**Where can people check out your work?**  
 People can find my work on Eli's website, ekfineart.com and liubollart.com - my personal website that showcases all my work. I would like to thank all my supporters and just say that I won't let you down. I will continue to create even better work in return for your support.

