

# Gorgeous Body Paintings Depict the Harmony of Chinese and East Asian Porcelain

DJ Pangburn — Aug 17 2016



*This article contains adult content.*



*Bloom. Images courtesy the artist*

Nothing in 2011 hit the musical zeitgeist quite like Gotye's "Somebody I Used to Know." Even the song's music video, with its stop-motion animation of body painting blending in with a wall behind Gotye and Kimbra, drew heaps of attention (and parody ([https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=gotye+parody](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=gotye+parody))). The artist behind the body

painting, [Emma Hack \(https://www.emmahackgallery.com\)](https://www.emmahackgallery.com), currently has several current and upcoming exhibitions of her work, including *Chinoiserie*, a show that opens August 25th at The Cat Street Gallery in Hong Kong.

For this exhibition, Hack uses as her jumping off point the tradition of *chinoiserie*, the 18th century European practice of interpreting and imitating Chinese and other East Asian artistic traditions for decorative arts, fashion, architecture and garden design, amongst other arts. The subjects of her series of body paintings are designed to look like porcelain busts standing in front of similarly patterned canvas backgrounds, photographed in lush fashion by Hack. Vibrant, surreal and mysterious, the works find Hack creatively interpreting the interpretations of chinoiserie, and exploring the conceptual territory of opposites.



*YIN I*



### *Utopia*

The *Chinoiserie* collection's two main works are *YIN* and *YANG*. Hack photographed her muse in many positions to produce a range of works showcasing different angles and therefore reflecting her model's energy. The smaller works in the collection are tight crops of details which accentuate the beauty of the patterns.

The photographs, with their colliding nature-themed patterns and colors, and the painted nude form paired with birds and butterflies, creates a psychedelic interplay between flatness and three-dimensionality. At first glance, it may look as if Hack is digitally collaging her imagery, but it is all a clever and highly coordinated combination of analog media. In a way, Hack's work looks almost like an artistic cousin to the surreal work of artistic duo Pierre et Gilles, who combined painting and photography to create highly stylized dreamworlds.



*RED BIRD III*



*China.*

Hack tells *The Creators Project* that she got her start in body painting while studying makeup artistry in 1990. At the time, Hack had been painting the faces of children, so her teacher, Bill Peacock, suggested she attempt painting the whole body, a suggestion Hack first explored by

painting clothing on it. Eventually, Hack started camouflaging her body painting subjects for her *Wallpaper* series, in which she made use of Australian designer Florence Broadhurst's wallpaper designs. This series led Hack to her work on the Gotye video.

“Verushka, the first supermodel in the late 60s, inspired the camouflage technique,” Hack says. “She used to paint herself into rustic walls and nature. I loved this illusion but wanted to push forward in a different way, so as not to recreate what has already been created.”



YANG I

“In 2005, I walked into a homeware store in my hometown of Adelaide and saw the Broadhurst wallpapers,” she adds. “I immediately knew this was how I wanted to create this collection of work.”

When it comes to exhibitions like *Chinoiserie*, Hack works out the themes and colors up to a year beforehand. These days, she only creates one wallpaper work every few years, so most of the backgrounds in her photographs are now painted on canvas. To create her works, Hack measures the model, positions them in front of a canvas, then paints the background

accordingly with acrylic paint. Once ready, Hack heads back into the studio with her muse and a photographic assistant, where they make sure the connection points (between model and background) are correct, then fills in the interior with live birds or butterflies.

All told, Hack's process takes between eight and 15 hours. For the works titled *YIN*, for example, Hack had to paint the model in the round, as she moved the model in front of the background. The illusion here, says Hack, was for the model to look "at one" with the background, not completely camouflaged.





*YANG I*

Emma Hack Wallpaper Collection 2005-2010 Documentary







*Emma Hack and body painting muse. Portrait by Darren Clements Photography.*

<http://www.thecatstreetgallery.com> runs August 25th to September 12th at The Cat Street Gallery in Hong Kong. The exhibition will also appear at [Seaview Gallery](https://www.emmahackgallery.com/pages/seaview-gallery) (<https://www.emmahackgallery.com/pages/seaview-gallery>) in Queenscliff, Victoria, Australia later this month. Hack's solo museum exhibition, [Body Flower](http://www.savinamuseum.com/eng/index.action) (<http://www.savinamuseum.com/eng/index.action>)—a retrospective of over ten years of her work—is now on at Savina Museum of Contemporary Art in Korea, and runs until October 30th.

Click here (<https://www.emmahackgallery.com>) to see more work by Emma Hack.

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