

Hey, that naked body rings a bell

By Richard Jinman

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Zhang Huan is unfamiliar to most Australians, but the Chinese artist's face does ring a bell.

This afternoon Huan will sound a 1.5 tonne Chinese temple bell inside the Museum of Contemporary Art by swinging a life-size bronze cast of his naked body headfirst into its rim.

Huan's bronze head will strike the bell several times during the climax of *My Sydney*, his contribution to the MCA's *Witness* exhibition.

A similar performance in New York last year was titled *Peace*, but Huan has tailored today's work - a free public performance that begins at 2.30pm with the release of 100 white doves on the MCA's forecourt - to reflect his response to Sydney.

"Sydney is more loving and warmer than New York," Huan, 39, said this week. "New York is like a man, but Sydney is like a girl."

My Sydney, which expresses Buddhist ideals such as wisdom, peace and forgiveness, will feature a chanting and martial arts display by a group of local Shaolin monks and their disciples.

It will be followed by a symbolic sheep shearing. Huan will use the fleece to "transform my skin" before sounding the bell inside the MCA.

Rachel Kent, the curator of the *Witness* exhibition, said the surface of the giant bell was inscribed with the names of eight generations of Huan's family.

"When the bell is rung it's a coming together of the artist and his family history."

Arranged on the gallery wall behind the bell is *Family Tree*, nine large photographs that show Huan's face being gradually obscured by Chinese calligraphy.

Huan, who moved to New York in 1998, was part of the same group of Chinese experimental artists as Zhu Ming, the artist who rolled around Sydney harbour in a giant plastic bubble in March last year. Like Ming, Huan is prepared to suffer for his art.

In an earlier work, *12 Square Meters*, he sat naked in a filthy latrine, covered in hone and flies.

On another occasion Huan strapped himself into the harness and used his body to ring the giant bell when delivery of the bronze replica was delayed.

"Yes, it was very, very painful," he said stroking his shaven head.

Ms Kent said the MCA had shipped the giant bell from Brazil, where it is in a private collection. She said *My Sydney* would be videotaped and the images displayed as part of the *Witness* exhibition, which explores the subject of memory and runs until May 16.