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## Review: CAUGHT

By Toby Zinman

Suffering Chinese prisoners. Art in social politics. Fraudulent self-aggrandizing claims by performers like Mike Daisy. All these flammable topics are right up InterAct Theatre Company's alley, right? They're the company that specializes in righteous indignation and intentional provocation. Well, prepare to be outfoxed by one of the smartest, most cynical, heartwrenching, brainteasing comedies I've seen in a long while, Christopher Chen's *Caught*, in a brilliant InterAct premiere. Bring your gullibility.

Real life collisions between THE Chinese government and Chinese artists and intellectuals are plentiful: last week China sentenced Ilham Tohti, a moderate economist to life in prison for "separatism." Before this came the 11-year jail sentence given to Nobel Peace Prize laureate Liu Xiaobo on charges of "subversion." Three years ago, the internationally famous Chinese artist Ai Weiwei was arrested at Beijing airport and imprisoned for 81 days for "tax evasion."

When I was in China six years ago, I visited sophisticated Swiss-owned art galleries in Beijing in an area called #798; I learned that these galleries were frequently raided and shut down by the authorities. But Chen adds a wrinkle: perhaps #798 is "subversive lite," the government's shrewd co-opting of the provocative. With enough cynicism it is possible to doubt everything you've ever thought worth protest or outrage. Without it, we fall for every trap *Caught* springs.

Director Rick Shiomi reveals he is master of the meta-scam as he slyly puts us through the show's paces:

First layer: *Caught* begins with an onstage art exhibition, a gallery we are invited to walk through before we sit in our theatre seats. The photographs are mostly cliché contemporary rubbish. And then (second layer) we listen to a stunning autobiographical lecture by the artist of these works, Lin Bo (Justin Jain). Then (third layer) the editor of the *New Yorker* (Ames Adamson) and a naïve journalist (Jessica Dalcanton) try to find out what's true and what's not in Lin Bo's prison story they have just published.

But Chen isn't finished with us, not by a long shot: Part Two piles meta layers on meta layers, including an interview with a famous Chinese artist (the extraordinary Bi Jean Ngo) who manages with twisted deconstructive argument to destroy the curator (Christie Paker). But wait—there are layers and layers yet to be revealed (no spoilers!), some political, some theatrical, some artistic, and some personal. The only truth this play has to offer is that truth is unknowable.

The cast is terrific and the set design (Melpomene Katakalos) is weirdly transformative. "A lie is like a cockroach—if you see one there are a hundred you don't see." *Caught* is a clever highly theatrical comedy, a spectacular con. Keep your eye out for cockroaches.