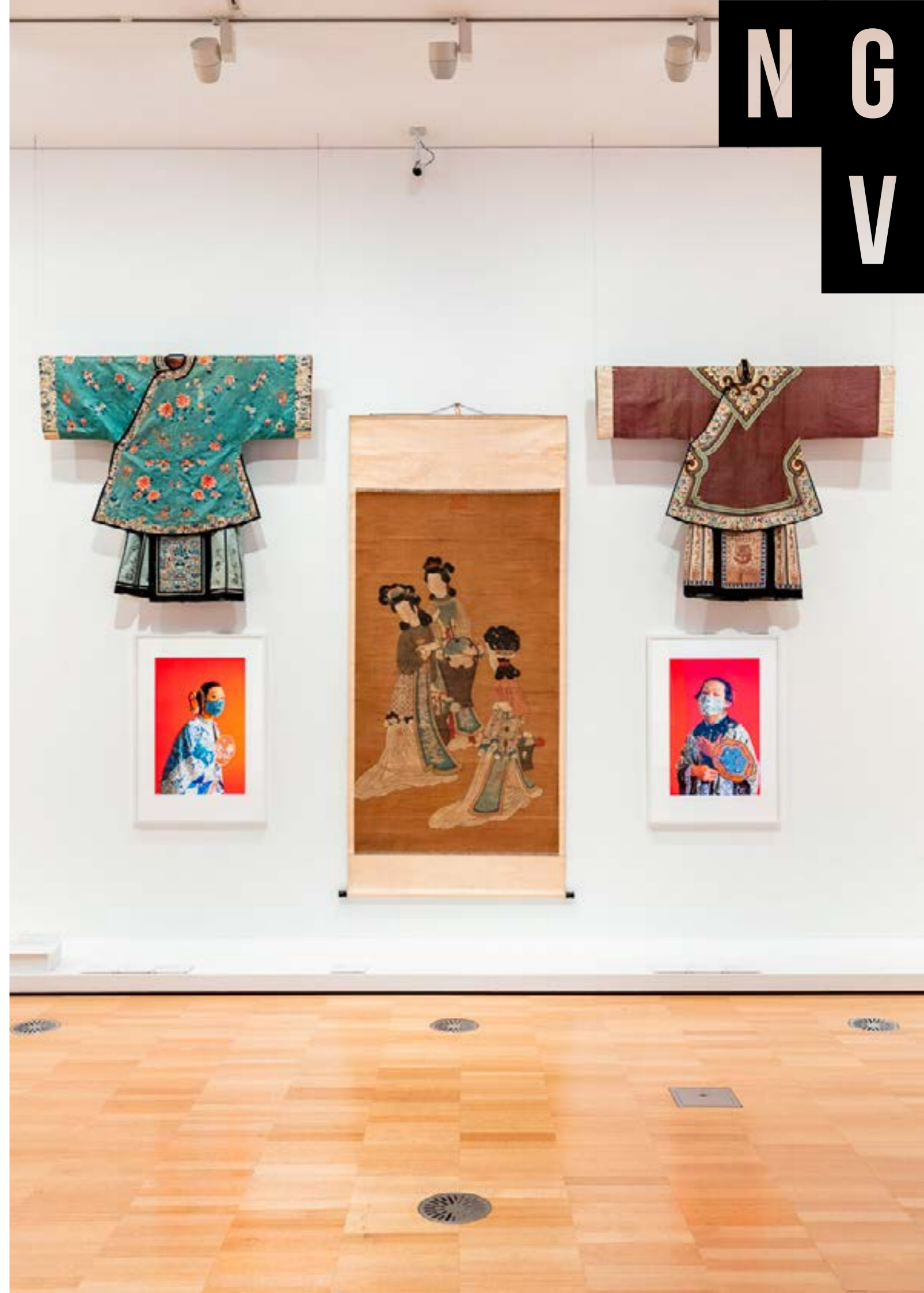


CHINA – THE PAST IS PRESENT

NGV INTERNATIONAL

15 OCT 2022 – 19 FEB 2023

NGV



EXHIBITION FACT SHEET

This fact sheet provides information specific to *China – The Past Is Present* to support the study of VCE Studio Arts – Art Industry Contexts Unit 4, Outcome 3 (2022) and VCE Art Making and Exhibiting – Exhibiting Artworks, Unit 3 Outcome 3 & Unit 4 Outcome 3, (2023). For a more detailed overview of exhibition preparation, presentation, conservation and promotion at the NGV refer to [VCE Studio Arts: Art Industry Contexts at NGV](#).



China – The Past Is Present installation view



ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

China – The Past Is Present is a collection-based exhibition offering a new interpretation of the NGV's historical and contemporary collection of Chinese art and design. The exhibition investigates key themes including spirituality and contemplation, power and prestige, compassion, auspicious symbols, belief and obsession, as well as the importance of the natural environment, mythology, scholarship and formal training in traditional practices. It explores the ongoing resonance of these cultural influences within the work of contemporary Chinese artists and designers.

NUMBER AND TYPE OF WORKS

The exhibition includes 94 works from the NGV Collection including a number of acquisitions being displayed at the NGV for the first time. Works span 5000 years of history and include paintings, calligraphy, ceramics, metal works, lacquer ware, textiles, furniture, photography, videos, posters and mixed media.

KEY ARTISTS

Ah Xian, Wong Wucius, Hedda Morrison, Guan Wei, Hai Bo, Sheng Qi, Louise Zhang, Xu Zhen, Ye Bihua, Xiao Lu, Qian Nanyuan, Hong Lei, Yuan Yao, Scotty So

China – The Past Is Present exhibition installation view.

KEY TEAM MEMBERS

NGV curators: Wayne Crothers (Senior Curator, Asian Art) and Sunita Lewis (Curatorial Project Officer, Asian Art)
Exhibition designer: Jenny Kan
Exhibition conservators: Conservators with material specialities and a coordinating conservator who has oversight for broad conservation concerns such as gallery conditions.

- MaryJo Lelyveld, Manager, Conservation
- Skye Firth, Senior Conservator, Textiles
- Ruth Shervington, Senior Conservator of Paper
- Marika Strohschneider, Senior Conservator, Objects
- Holly McGowan-Jackson, Senior Conservator of Frames and Furniture

Marketing coordinator: Matilda McKenna
Exhibition management, Emma North.
Installation crew leader, Chris Maxwell

CURATORIAL RATIONALE

The exhibition juxtaposes historical and contemporary works in thematic groupings to highlight the continuity of Chi-nese cultural traditions and their ongoing significance in contemporary Chinese culture.

THE THEMATIC GROUPINGS ARE:

- Contemplative spaces
- Heavenly retreats
- Idealism and pragmatism
- Belief and obsession
- Red and white, *Hong Bai Shi*
- Spontaneous expression
- Auspicious symbols
- Power and prestige
- Association and experience
- Compassion and empathy
- Air, breath, life
- The ebb and flow of time

IN THE GALLERY



SELECTED WORKS



SCHOLAR MOUND STUDY #3, 2019

Scholar mound study #3, 2019, is an investigation of the traditional Chinese scholar's rock, or *Gongshi*. Shaped by the forces of earth, wind and water, scholar's rocks were displayed like works of art and appreciated by Chinese scholars for their ability to capture the creative energy of nature (*ch'i*). Louise Zhang subverts the restrained aesthetics of the traditional scholar's rock. Using sugary colours and unnatural materials she creates a playful but uncomfortable amorphous form that explores the space between attraction and repulsion.

Louise Zhang

Scholar mound study #3 2019

foam clay, polyurethane, synthetic polymer paint, pigment,
transparent synthetic polymer resin, wood, glass, plastic pearls
42.1 x 38.0 x 39.8 cm

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased with funds donated by Jo Horgan and MECCA Brands,
2021

2021.59

© Courtesy the artist and Arterial Gallery, Sydney

Photo: Silversalt Photography

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Zhang's *Scholar mound study #3* is one of a group of works related to the theme of Contemplative Spaces that greets the viewer at the entrance to the exhibition. Works are displayed in a balanced arrangement, in which historical and contemporary works are juxtaposed and masculine elements are mirrored by feminine counterparts. Zhang's *Scholar mound #3* is reflected in a traditional scholar's rock set in a seventeenth-century carved timber base and *Sofa – Black*, 2016, by Xu Zhen, a solid black polyurethane foam seat, cut with facets to mimic the rough edges of a natural rock.

Formed with foam clay, polyurethane, synthetic polymer paint, pigment, transparent synthetic polymer resin, wood, glass, and plastic pearls *Scholar's mound #3* is light sensitive and fragile. It is displayed on a silicon sheet in an acrylic display case to protect it from damage and light levels are kept below fifty lux.



China - *The Past is Present* exhibition installation view.

SELECTED WORKS



PHANTOM LANDSCAPE, 2010

Phantom landscape is a digital video work projected on a specially prepared wall. At first glance, the work resembles a traditional Chinese ink painting depicting a landscape with towering mountains, calm seas, floating mists and cascading waterfalls, with the artist's seal stamped in the corner in red. Closer inspection reveals layered skyscrapers, moving cranes, busy streets and bursting waterways. A soundtrack of Chinese classical music played on the *qin* (lute) is gradually displaced by the noise of a modern city. *Phantom landscape* belongs to a series begun in 2006, drawing on the artist's study of traditional Chinese landscape painting and using contemporary media to comment on modern life.

Yang Yongliang
Phantom landscape 2010 (still)
colour digital video, sound
3 min 23 sec
ed. 4/5
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased NGV Foundation, 2011
2011.3
© Yang Yongliang

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Phantom landscape is displayed in the central area of the exhibition space grouped with works under the theme of Heavenly Retreats. The walls and plinths of this central space are painted in a deep red creating a contemplative atmosphere evocative of Chinese antiquity in keeping with the theme. Displayed opposite *Phantom landscape* is a 2.3 meters high and 6.6 meters wide ink painting on twelve silk scrolls, by Qing dynasty landscape painter Yuan Yao titled *Sublime landscape*, 1770. *Sublime landscape* depicts a mountain scene with architecture, figures and a turbulent ocean. The pairing of these works made 240 years apart invites the viewer to consider changing responses to the landscape and the evolution of artistic expression. A stand-off floor plinth protects the scrolls from visitors' touching. Due to the age and light sensitive nature of the work, *Sublime landscape*, is displayed with low lighting at levels of fifty lux. When not on display, scrolls are rolled up and stored in archival boxes to protect them from dust and light. *Sublime landscape* and *Phantom landscape* are distanced from each other to reduce the impact of the light from the digital screen on the scrolls. A small bronze Western Han dynasty (206 BCE -24 CE) incense burner in the shape of a mountain is displayed between them, visually and thematically connecting the two works.



Installation view of the central exhibition space with the theme of Heavenly Retreats.

SELECTED WORKS



UNTITLED, 2015

Untitled, 2015, is a robe by contemporary designer Ye Bihua. Made from black wool fabric, it is embellished with golden dragons and a wide golden hem formed from carefully arranged hairpins. The work references the motifs and design of the traditional dragon robes worn exclusively by the Chinese imperial household, which were painstakingly hand woven by skilled craftspeople using luxury silks. The contemporary robe produced with a simple technique using accessible, everyday materials comments on high fashion as well as the overwhelming quantity of mass-produced, cheaply made small items.

Ye Bihua (designer)
Fangye Lab (fashion house)
Untitled 2015
wool, metal (hairpins, safety pins), plastic
(a) 205.0 × 162.0 × 150.0 cm (robe) (b-d) 30.0 × 30.0 × 0.5 cm (each)
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Presented by the Hans Nefkens Foundation, 2019
2019.45
© Fang Ye

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Ye Bihua's *Untitled* robe is hung on a rod which is suspended by two wires from the ceiling, supporting the weight of the work (approximately 80 kilograms). A custom-made clear acrylic stand supports and gives form to the robe at the hem. The work is affected by gravity due to the weight of the pins and wool fabric, limiting the length of time it can be displayed. The work is shown with an emperor's *jifu* (auspicious attire) or court robe from the late 19th century, which is suspended on a clear acrylic rod. The works are within the thematic grouping *Power and Prestige*. *Jifu* were worn for semi-formal occasions – such as banquets and festivities – at the imperial court in the Forbidden City. The court robe in the exhibition was once worn by a Qing emperor of the late nineteenth century (possibly Emperor Guangxu, who ruled from 1874 to 1908). Bright yellow was reserved for use by the emperor as well as the empress and the empress dowager. The robe is decorated with traditional Chinese emblems of imperial authority and symbols of good fortune, arranged according to Chinese cosmological principles. The mythical dragon symbolising the emperor – who was often referred to as the True Dragon – is the dominant motif. Due to the light sensitivity of textiles, lighting is kept to fifty lux.



Ye Bihua's contemporary robe is displayed with a 19th century court robe to invite comparison and consideration of materials, techniques and contexts.



Conservators prepared custom made acrylic supports and utilised hanging systems that display the works safely.

SELECTED WORKS



SINGING WOMAN, 2000; SMOKING MAN, 2000

Chang Xugong's *Smoking man*, 2000, and *Singing woman*, 2000, are machine embroidered portraits made from satin thread, stretched on strainers for display. Chang's portraits – with their garish colours and depictions of popular culture and fashion – satirise the obsession with quick wealth and consumer goods that followed economic reforms in China during the 1990s. Chung's symbols of contemporary society and modern day status include a man smoking a cigarette, a woman singing karaoke, a fluffy lapdog, a Nescafé coffee satchel, a golf player, a white statue of Venus de Milo and the characters for 'wealth' in Chinese. A parody of traditional, hand embroidered folk art, Chang's works comment on the meaningless mass-reproduction of auspicious symbols, cultural motifs and changing social values driven by consumer culture.

(left)
Chang Xugong
Singing woman 2000
silk, rayon, cotton (machine embroidery)
100.0 × 80.0 cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, NGV Supporters of Asian Art and NGV Foundation, 2021
2021.577

(right)
Chang Xugong
Smoking man 2000
silk, rayon, cotton (machine embroidery)
100.0 × 80.0 cm
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, NGV Supporters of Asian Art and NGV Foundation, 2021
2021.576

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

To prepare the portraits for display, conservators removed some residual adhesive tape and yellowing caused by the adhesive from the front of the works. Grouped with works under the theme of Auspicious Symbols, Chang's contemporary works are displayed with Qing dynasty shoes embroidered with symbols to impart fortune to the wearer, and *Embroidered hanging depicting Daoist immortals* (made during the early twentieth century), a 461 cm long, hand-stitched banner made with silk and gold thread, red wool fabric, and cotton backing. The vibrant red, the auspicious symbols and figures in the banner's design, represent traditional figures of Chinese Daoist belief and culture. *Embroidered hanging depicting Daoist immortals* was acquired by the NGV in 1937 and has not been displayed for many decades. To prepare this work for exhibition, conservators brush-vacuumed the surface of the work to remove dust and bring out the colours of the embroidery, and carefully steamed, dusted, detangled and brushed the tassels. Due to its size, only a selected portion of the banner could be displayed, with the ends rolled around two acrylic rods. Light levels are kept below fifty lux.



Works in this grouping illustrate the changing use of auspicious symbols in embroidery over time. The symmetrical arrangement of works is echoed throughout the exhibition.

EXHIBITION DESIGN



Exhibition artwork plan prepared by NGV Exhibition Design to communicate the proposed layout of the exhibition.

IN THE GALLERY



EXHIBITION DESIGN



China – The Past is Present is displayed at NGV International in the Asian Art temporary exhibition space on Level 1. The exhibition design utilises the key structural features of the preceding exhibition (*Transforming Worlds: Change and Tradition in Contemporary India*), including stand-off plinths (low floor plinths to prevent art touches) around the perimeter of the room, central walls and covered display plinths to protect fragile works.

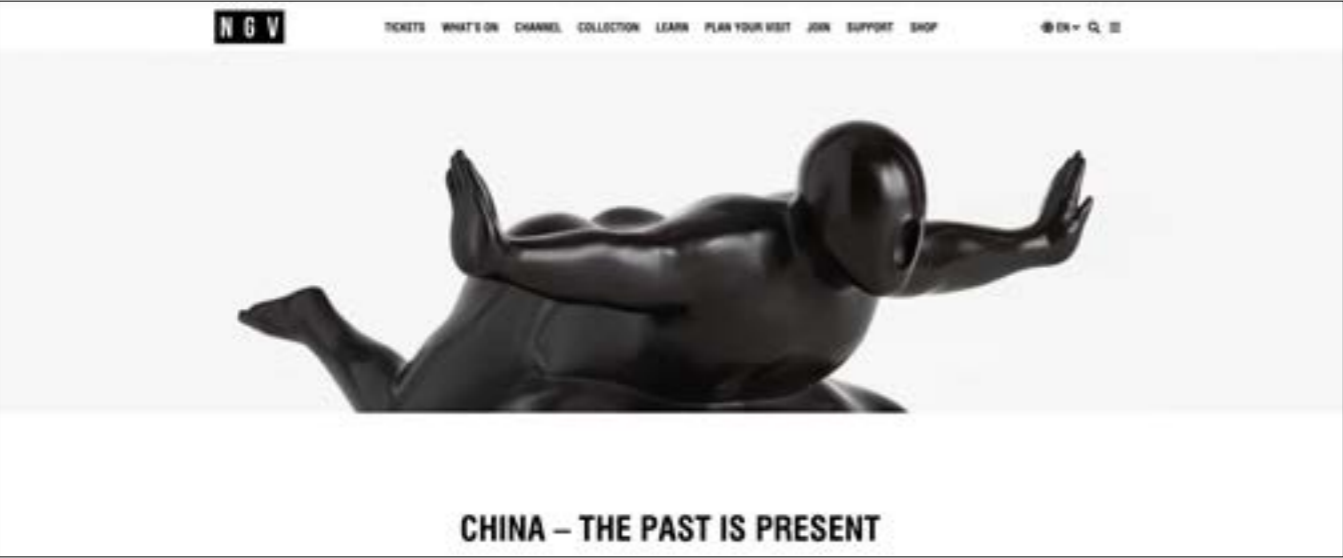
The overall design of the exhibition is informed by principles of balance and symmetry, as might be found in a traditional Chinese architecture and interior settings. Each of the three walls of the square gallery has three thematic groupings, with a further three groupings in the middle of the gallery. A deep red (Dulux Auburn Lights), drawn from one of the works on display, is used to create focus and mood in the central space of the gallery, and is echoed in other works throughout the exhibition. The remainder of the walls are painted white (Dulux Lexicon Quarter). The title wall and introductory didactic utilise Swis721 font in the same red as the central space.

Didactic labels written in both English and simplified Chinese introduce the thematic groupings within the exhibition. Didactics are displayed on floor risers on the stand off plinths. Labels are also placed on the stand off plinths to minimise visual clutter on the walls.

EXHIBITION PROMOTION

Several art works have been chosen as images to represent the exhibition in its promotion including Guan Wei's *Up in the clouds no. 1*, 2012, and Xiao Lu's *One (detail 2)*, 2015, printed 2017. Selected works capture the dynamism and diversity of contemporary Chinese art practice, while showing clear connections to Chinese artistic and cultural tradition.

The exhibition has been promoted via a media release which is sent to media outlets by the NGV Public Affairs and Media team, and online on NGV owned channels such as the NGV website, social media, eNews, What's On guides and NGV Magazine. It is also promoted in NGV International, NGV Australia and Fed Square through screens and signs. Social media promotion includes paid promotion and posts of short videos and images on the NGV's Instagram and Facebook accounts, as well as targeted promotion on Chinese social media (WeChat, Weibo) in Chinese. Programming has been developed to engage with the broader Chinese community in Victoria, including special events and curator tour to align with Lunar New Year celebration.



NGV Website.

NGV Instagram post.



IN THE GALLERY



NOTES

1 National Gallery of Victoria, 2020, 'Personal symbolism: the art of Louise Zhang', NGV, Victorian Government, <<https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/personal-symbolism-the-art-of-louise-zhang/>> , [accessed 5 October 2022].

2 Mae Anna Pang, 'Yang Yongliang Phantom Landscape', Art Journal, 51, 20 July 2013, National Gallery of Victoria, <<https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/essay/yang-yongliang-phantom-landscape/>> , [accessed 5 October 2022].

3 National Gallery of Victoria, 'NGV Asian art resource', NGV, Victorian Government, <
2022. https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Sheet7_AsianEduRes_A4_sheets_DVD.pdf> , [accessed 5 October 2022].

FURTHER RESOURCES

- VCE Studio Arts: Art Industry Contexts at NGV
This resource is design to support the VCE Studio Arts study design, but information will also support VCE Art Making and Exhibiting
- VCE Art Exhibiting and Making
Study Design and VCAA support materials for implementation 2023
- National Gallery of Victoria, Explore Conservation <https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/conservation/explore-conservation/>

NGV SCHOOLS PROGRAM PARTNERS



Education
and Training



The NGV gratefully acknowledges the Packer Family and Crown Resorts Foundations for their support of the Your NGV Arts Access Program for Students, Children and Families. The NGV warmly thanks Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family for their support of the NGV School Support Program.

