

OUR JOURNEYS | OUR STORIES

Cindy Yuen-Zhe Chen

'Our Journeys | Our Stories is supported by the NSW Government through Create NSW.'

Georges River Council acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land in which the Georges River Local Government Area is situated – the Bidjegal people of the Eora Nation.

Cover image: Cindy Yuen-Zhe Chen, *Divining possible pathways* 2021 (detail)
Ink, watercolour and pencil on Wenzhou paper.

OUR JOURNEYS | OUR STORIES

Our Journeys | Our Stories explores the Chinese migration history of the Georges River area, interweaving social and cultural history with the work of contemporary Chinese-Australian artists Cindy Yuen-Zhe Chen, Guo Jian, Lindy Lee, Xiao Lu, Jason Phu, and Guan Wei.

This educational resource was created for *Our Journeys | Our Stories*, exhibited at Hurstville Museum & Gallery. It is designed to assist Visual Art and Visual Design teachers and students from years 5 - 12. The images and suggested activities are to be used together with relevant syllabus documents and teaching resources, and should be used as a guide for teachers, adjusting activities to suit the needs of their students.

A hard copy of the exhibition catalogue is also available for purchase from Hurstville Museum & Gallery and is a valuable tool that can be used alongside this resource.

For the *Our Journeys | Our Stories* exhibition Cindy Yuen-Zhe Chen created *Divining possible pathways*. Learn more about her practice and process for creating this work throughout this educational resource.

“I would like to elicit moments of curiosity: why did the artist do this? How did she do this? Could I go home and do this myself?”

I believe that exercising people’s brains, provoking imagination and dreams, and making them ask questions is a good antidote for the mindless consumption that is reinforced by contemporary media and culture.”

Cindy Yuen-Zhe Chen

ARTIST Q&A

What advice would you give to a person who is passionate about their art making but doesn't know where to start? What is the best piece of advice you have been given?

Value each contribution that you can make as an individual, whether you are practicing professionally or making art for your own joy. For me, art is about eliciting curiosity and compelling people to ask questions; these moments of experiential disruption and openness are gifts that artists can give to the world. The world needs you, keep going.

Has your work undergone a particular development/transformation?

In recent years during my PhD research, my practice has shifted towards articulating processes of interaction and bodily entanglement with places rather than depicting or visually representing ideas.

Do you plan for an exhibition or produce constantly and choose work for a particular exhibition?

It is a mixture of both. I constantly have ideas that I want to explore or enquiries that have emerged from previous works that I want to develop further, so I will try to fit these into projects or exhibitions that come my way.

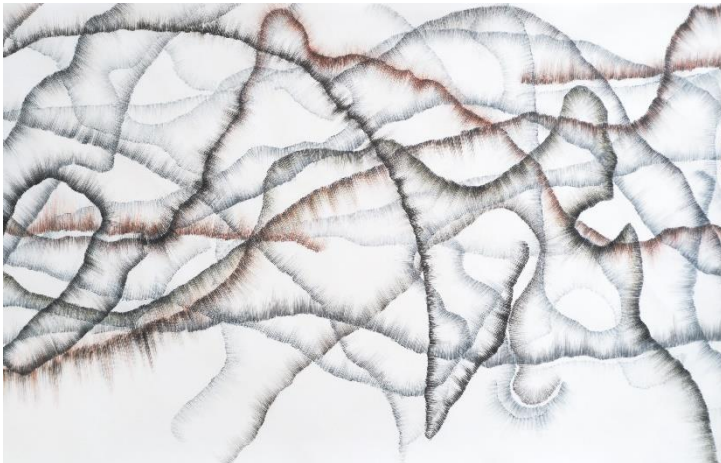
What is next?

I aim to create multi-sensory installations that will expand audiences' experiences of my sound feedback drawing processes. This will involve developing relationships with various institutions and undertaking skills development through artist mentorships and technology training programs.

MATERIAL AND PRACTICE

Can you explain your technique; how you manipulate the medium?

My expanded drawing practice is extended through listening and sounding processes. A breakthrough in my practice occurred when I began to question the tools and techniques of drawing that privileged visual experience and began to create my own tools and methodologies. One of these processes is the Sound Feedback Drawing that I undertake within chosen places, or create in response to recordings that I have made. This process reimagines gesture and mark-making in drawing by using sound as the medium which expresses movement. I also rework surfaces and supports for drawing by creating structures that are responsive to movement or work with my body. I also disrupt deliberate visual composition by employing aleatory processes such as engaging with the wind.



Cindy Yuen-Zhe Chen,
Divining possible pathways
2021 (detail), ink, watercolour
and pencil on Wenzhou paper.

Can you give us an insight into your artistic process? Is your work pre-planned or created intuitively? How long does each work take to complete?

My practice is quite multifaceted and the process will differ depending on the type of project that I am working on. For my independent research and expanded drawing practice, I like to plan experiments that are open to risk, uncertainty and contingencies of places and sonic events. I would say that all of my processes which include sound and video recording and editing, the construction of paper mediators or scrolls, working in situ within the environment, fine ink and brush drawing, cooking glue and wet mounting layers of paper, are very labour intensive and take a great deal of time.

Where do you draw your inspiration or source for the idea which the artwork explores and/or expresses?

Ideas for my experiments will often emerge intuitively or in response to previous works or to information that I have read (often in scientific journals or YouTube channels). I find that pieces which are more visually oriented such as the drawings that I produce for the commercial gallery that represents me, the planning and composition process will be more sequential and orderly and I will look at traditional Chinese and Japanese paintings and calligraphy for inspiration.

What do you want your work to do? Is there a particular reaction that you want to evoke?

I would like to elicit moments of curiosity: why did the artist do this? how did she do this? could I go home and do this myself?

I believe that exercising peoples brains, provoking imagination and dreams, and making them ask questions is a good antidote for the mindless consumption that is reinforced by contemporary media and culture.

Do you keep some kind of sketchbook or diary? Or a collection of images or photographs for inspiration?

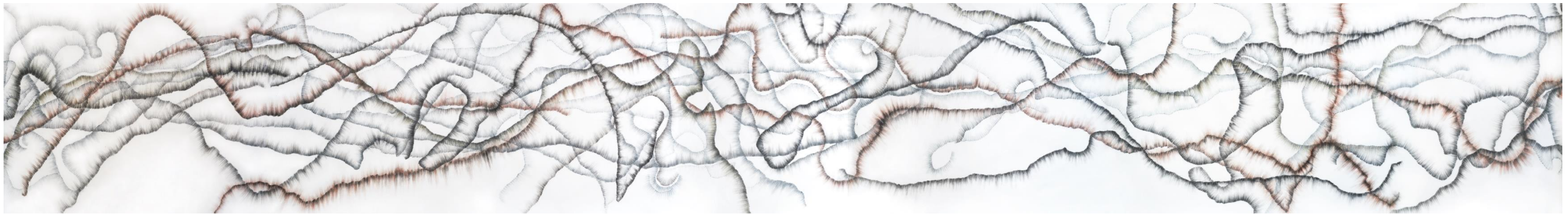
I tend to write a lot and include very rough sketches of ideas for contraptions and compositions in notebooks.

Who are your favourite artists? Who do you draw inspiration from?

Some important influences on my work are: Dorothy Napangardi, particularly her paintings of women ancestors dancing across Warlpiri Country; Bingyi, a contemporary Chinese artist for her incredible innovations and effects with ink; Bianca Hester, Sarah Mosca and Emma Fielden for their poetic, intellectual and conceptual processes that engage with geology, history and science; Sesshu Toyo, a 15th century Japanese Zen Buddhist priest and artist; Hasegawa Tohaku, 16th century Japanese artist, particularly his Pine Trees; Muqi Fachang, a 13th century Chinese Chan Buddhist monk and artist; Joyce Hinterding, for her work with energies and antennae drawings; Alvin Lucier, for his work with binaural sound feedback; John Cage, for his aleatory and conceptual processes.

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Cindy Yuen-Zhe Chen



Cindy Yuen-Zhe Chen, *Divining possible pathways* 2021,
Ink, watercolour and pencil on Wenzhou paper.

RESPONSE TO THE FORTUNE TELLING STICKS - 求籤 QIÚQIĀN (MANDARIN) OR KAUCIM (CANTONESE)



These bamboo fortune telling sticks are compelling objects that remind me of visiting temples with my mother and relatives on our holidays in Malaysia. Although as a child, I did not fully comprehend their function as mediators of divine guidance, they were a great deal of fun to play with. I now understand that the strength of your enquiry and purity of intention is seen to direct the verdict of the local deity (I remember that most of the temples we visited were dedicated to Guanyin Pusa (also known as the Goddess of Mercy or the bodhisattva Avalokitesvara).

In the context of the work I have made for *Our Journeys | Our Stories*, I decided to draw upon the elements of chance that are inherent within the practice of using 求籤 qiúqiān.



Images: *Game, 'Chi-Chi', Chinese Daily Fortune Teller* (1930-39).
Paper, cardboard, bamboo,
Alfred L Moms, Sydney,
New South Wales.
Museum of Applied Arts and
Sciences, Sydney.



I was also fascinated by how this practice articulates a desire to ascertain some form of direction amidst the uncertainty of manifold possible pathways in our lives. This understanding intermingled with my interpretation of the oral histories provided by local people in the Georges River area and how their journeys made unexpected twists and turns in response to contingent events that unfolded when they arrived in Australia. These ideas are expressed through my use of aleatory drawing processes that engage with the wind in Oatley Park on Biddegal Country. Each line embodies a possible path that I could journey along in the 30 years that I have lived in Australia. The gesture of gently throwing or scattering objects is also an action that I hope to incorporate into a drawing workshop in the exhibition's public programs.

FRAMES

- Cultural:** Constructs of identity, race, merging of historical and contemporary experience
- Structural:** Visual symbols Embedded in the material and form. Interpretation is conveyed throughout the artmaking process
- Subjective:** Works are linked to memory and experience
- Postmodern:** Challenging the interpretation of historical objects, stories, and figures. Recontextualising historical objects by viewing them through a contemporary perspective on racism.

Subject – People, Places and Spaces

Forms – Digital, Documented Forms, Drawing

KEY WORDS

Multi-Sensory – using more than one of the senses

Installation – a 3-dimensional artwork designed to change and audience's experience of a space

Gesture - a drawing mark made through a quick and simple movement

Aleatory – artmaking choices based on chance

Intuitive – decisions based on what a person feels to be true

In-situ – at a particular site

QUESTIONS

STAGE 3

Cindy Chen creates drawings to record her experience of time and place. She listens carefully to the sounds around her and creates a drawn record of what she hears.

- Write a sentence describing the place you are in.
- Sit quietly for 5 minutes and make a list of the different sounds which you can hear.
- Select two sounds from your list which you think best describe the space you are in. Write a sentence explaining why you think each of these sounds describes the place you are in.

STAGE 4

- Look at Cindy Chen's drawings in her work, *Divining Possible Pathways*. Describe the types of lines she has used in these drawings.
- Cindy Chen describes each of her drawings as a pathway. Explain how she has used line to record pathways in her drawings.
- Cindy Chen responds to the sounds around her while she is drawing. She responds to these sounds while she is drawing through gesture. Look carefully at her drawings and describe the types of sounds you imagine she heard while making this work.

STAGE 5

- Cindy Chen uses traditional drawing mediums in her work - ink, brush and paper - however she challenges traditional styles of drawing. List aspects of her drawing practice which challenge the way you define drawing.

- Cindy Chen creates her drawings in-situ and makes recording of the sounds she experiences while she is there. How does this process make a connection between the artist and the world?
- How do you think her work would change if she waited to return to a studio to complete the drawings?

STAGE 6

- Cindy Chen's work, *Divining Possible Pathways* is included in the exhibition *Our Journeys | Our Stories* as an installation which includes both drawings and sound recordings. How does this multi-sensory experience change an audience's experience of her drawings?
- How does Cindy Chen's creation of 30 separate pathways symbolise her personal journey?

DISCUSSION

- Cindy Chen is interested in using the act of drawing to deepen her connection to place. How do you think this aspect of her conceptual practice connects with the theme of the exhibition *Our Journeys | Our Stories*?

ESSAY QUESTIONS

How does Cindy Chen's material practice intersect with her conceptual practice?

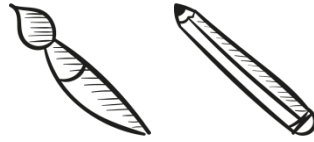
Explore ways in which artists challenge their audiences to question traditional or mainstream practices.

ARTMAKING

Materials



*Large sheet
of paper*



*Drawing materials - e.g.
pencil, charcoal, ink
and brush*

Process

1. Choose an outdoor space of importance to you e.g., a park, garden, playground, or local bushland.
2. Take a large piece of paper and drawing materials with you and sit quietly for a few minutes listening carefully to the sounds around you. When you feel ready begin to create a record of the sounds you hear on your page using gestural marks. Your marks should record aspects of the sounds such as volume, pitch (how high or low the sounds are), length and repetition. Remember you are not trying to create a picture so avoid the temptation to draw a bird if you hear one.
3. You could extend this artmaking by using your phone to record the sounds you hear while you are drawing and creating an installation where your drawing is displayed while the recording you made is played.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Cindy Chen website

<https://cyzchen.com/>

Art Atrium Artists

<http://artatrium.com.au/cindy-yuen-zhe-chen/>

Artist Talk– Chinese Cultural
Centre in Sydney 23/03/2021

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XAR_PsPmkGM

The Guardian – Grayson Perry:
'As we come blinking into the
light, leave a space in your life
to make art'

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2020/aug/14/grayson-perry-as-we-come-blinking-into-the-light-leave-a-space-in-your-life-to-make-art>

GETTING TO HURSTVILLE MUSEUM & GALLERY

Parking

There is limited free 2 hour parking next to Hurstville Museum & Gallery, via MacMahon Street. Please note the time restrictions and rules on all street signs when parking.

By public transport

Train services to Hurstville run on the South Coast and Eastern Suburbs & Illawarra lines. Both the Bus Interchange and Hurstville Station are a 5 minute walk to Hurstville Museum & Gallery. For further details and to plan your trip, visit: www.transportnsw.info/trip

Accessibility

The MacMahon Street carpark contains one accessible parking space. All public areas within the Hurstville Museum & Gallery building are wheelchair accessible and companion animals are welcome. A wheelchair accessible bathroom is located in the Main Gallery. This bathroom contains a fold-down baby change table. Hurstville Museum & Gallery is a Companion Card affiliated venue and accepts Companion Cards for our ticketed events.

Contact details

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Blog: hurstvillemuseumgallery.wordpress.com

Back cover image: *Teapot and basket* (c. 1890-1920)
White china, bamboo and straw.
Courtesy of North Sydney Heritage Centre, Stanton Library.

