



OUR JOURNEYS | OUR STORIES

Guo Jian

'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.

Indigenous Australians are advised that this resource contains images of people that may now be deceased.

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Cover image: Guo Jian, *Where the river flows* 2021, (detail)
Inkjet on photo paper
Photography: Deephouse Print Studio

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 Guo Jian created *Where the river flows*. Learn more about his practice and process for creating this work throughout this educational resource.

“Every time I turned on the computer to search for stories about the early settlers in Australia, apart from the innumerable pictures and materials about the hardship, perseverance, bravery, and frontier expansion of the early settlers, I would see a lot of documentary photographs and cartoons of Indigenous Australians being massacred, and racism towards Chinese immigrants. Between these, flashing up alternately on the computer screen, were those classically beautiful, colonial European landscape paintings.”

Guo Jian

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?

Pick up your sketch book and begin to draw your ideas till you are satisfied.

What is the best piece of advice you have been given?

Same as above.

Has your work undergone a particular development/transformation?

Yes, both historical events and personal experiences are practical opportunities for my artistic creation to transform naturally.

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

My creation is basically based on my feelings, so I will choose works to participate in the exhibition, and I will also create works that meet the requirements of the exhibition for some exhibitions I would like to participate in.

What is next?

Don't know yet.



Guo Jian, *Where the river flows* 2021, (detail)
Inkjet on photo paper
Photography: Deephouse Print Studio

MATERIAL AND PRACTICE

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

I used computer software to combine and collage the images I collected related to the creation topic on Photoshop to form the images I wanted.

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 ideas start with intuition, and then I will make a plan to accomplish them.

Sometimes I finish it as quick as few days, and some as long as half or a year to complete.

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

In my bed, my kitchen and my backyard....

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

Make the audience stop and see if they can make any associations with my questions.

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

Yes, I do.

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

Chinese painter Guo Xi, from Song Dynasty and a Spanish painter, Francisco Goya.



Guo Jian, *Where the river flows* 2021.
Inkjet on photo paper
Photography: Deephouse Print Studio

FRAME

- 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, Objects, Places

Forms – Digital

KEY WORDS

Memorial – a structure built in memory of people who have died.

Landscape – an artwork depicting natural scenery.

Monochrome – an artwork created using only one colour.

Sepia – a reddish brown ink, a term referring to brown toned photographs from the 19th century.

QUESTIONS

STAGE 3

- List the things that you can see in the landscape of the Georges River in *Where the river flows*.
- Guo Jian's artwork is based on a historical image of the Georges River. List the things that you would expect to see in an image of the Georges River today which are not in Guo Jian's artwork.
- Look closely at the home in the artwork. Is it very different from your home? How?

STAGE 4

- On first viewing *Where the river flows*, how does this work make you feel?
- Guo Jian has created this work from a collage of images from Australia's history. Look closely at these and make a list of the different types of people who are depicted.
- How do you feel when you view these historic images? Does this change the way that this artwork makes you feel?



Guo Jian, *Where the river flows* 2021, (detail)
Inkjet on photo paper
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STAGE 5

Read the quotes from Guo Jian’s artist’s statement and answer the questions.

“Every time I opened the computer to search for stories about the early settlers in Australia, apart from the innumerable pictures and materials about the hardship, perseverance, bravery, and frontier expansion of the early settlers, I would see a lot of documentary photographs and cartoons of Indigenous Australians being massacred, and anti-Chinese sentiments (against immigrants). Between these, flashing up alternately on the computer screen were those classically-beautiful, colonial European landscape paintings.”

Guo Jian

- On first viewing *Where the river flows* which story of Australia did you think he was presenting to his audience? Why do you think this?

“Shocked from seeing and hearing—both on social media and in real life—the conservative, far-right, racist and even fascist comments in relation to these histories, I had the idea of putting what had happened in history—the suffering, the blood, the discrimination and arrogance—into a beautiful, classic, colonial style of landscape painting, as a way of allowing the audience to feel the grief of what seems to be far away in the past.”

Guo Jian

- After reading the second quote, which stories of Australia do you think he is presenting in *Where the river flows*?

STAGE 6

- Guo Jian references traditional Chinese landscape painting in his work by dividing it into a series of panels. What aspect of his personal experience do you think these reference?
- Guo Jian includes a beautiful colonial building but juxtaposes it with a dark meaning. Does this change the way you respond to *Where the river flows*?

DISCUSSION

- There is an absence of human figures in the landscape of *Where the river flows*. Instead, Guo Jian includes a colonial building which serves as a memorial to people from the darker stories of Australia's history. At the same time, the image is comprised of 100s of images of these people. How does the juxtaposition of the absence and presences of figures create layers of meaning in this work?

ESSAY QUESTION

Artist's can use their work to challenge traditional values, beliefs, and attitudes. Discuss this with reference to *Where the river flows* and at least one other work.

FURTHER RESOURCES

Guo Jian website	https://guojianart.com
Artist Profile: Guo Jian	https://artistprofile.com.au/guo-jian
ARC ONE Artist Profile	https://arcone.com.au/guo-jian-artist-profile
Art Atrium Artist Guo Jian	https://artatrium.com.au/guo-jian
The Asian Dialogue: Guo Jian: the art of dissent	https://theasiadialogue.com/2018/03/06/guo-jian-the-art-of-dissent/

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.

