



OUR JOURNEYS | OUR STORIES

Xiao Lu

'Our Journeys | Our Stories is supported 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: Xiao Lu, *Remember 2: protest march against the China extradition bill, Hong Kong*.
Photo taken 15 September 2019, printed: 2021
Digital print

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 7 - 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, Xiao Lu created *Remember 1: Victoria Park*; *Remember 2: protest march against the China extradition bill*; *Remember 3: Skew performance*. Learn more about her practice and process for creating this artwork throughout this educational resource.

“Art is a very individual and lonely road. Most of the time you spend facing your own existence, and you cannot control whether you succeed or fail. So if you have a passion for this business of making art, then pour your energy and your attention into it. Trust your own intuition and judgment and derive from them an understanding of and self-confidence in art.”

Xiao Lu

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?

Passion is a devil. It is both the most instinctive factor and the force most able to control one's actions, and it is an indispensable component in working in art. The road I followed when I was studying art was relatively passive. It was dancing that I liked as a child, and I only started painting because I had broken my ankle. Later I studied art at the Central Academy of Fine Art High School in Beijing and at the Zhejiang Academy of Fine Art in Hangzhou. Thinking back on my eight years of study now, there was no talk about passion. The main goal was to complete one's homework. The real factor that made me transform passion into creating artworks, and consciously reflect on certain problems, really dates from after 2003. For this reason I think of myself as someone who realises things in hindsight. I don't know whether I might suggest something useful: Art is a very individual and lonely road. Most of the time you spend facing your own existence, and you cannot control whether you succeed or fail. So if you have a passion for this business of making art, then pour your energy and your attention into it. Trust your own intuition and judgment and derive from them an understanding of and self-confidence in art.

Has your work undergone a particular development/transformation?

The changes in one's works are related to changes in oneself. All the various reactions to life in specific conditions are a path to understanding one's relationship with society. The developments and transformations in one's works are a gradual process. To develop, one needs the accumulation of experiences, and transformations are the breakthroughs on the basis of the accumulation of experience. Sometimes both are happening at the same time. All this depends on your attitude to human existence and art, as well as on your values. Has there been a specific transformation in my artworks? Until 2012 I was relatively focused on my emotions as an individual, whereas in the later works I have begun to pay attention to more areas including society.

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

Mostly I won't actively go and plan an exhibition. In my collaboration with institutions and curators I go with the flow. Because people know my performance works, there will usually be a curator or an institution inviting me to create a performance work. Because I am not willing to repeat my previous performance works, each time I work with somebody it is a new work. And the deepest experience that I have had in recent years is the expression of free will. This is also the bottom line that I maintain in my collaboration with others.

What is next?

My next show is this exhibition at the Hurstville Museum & Gallery. After, I will take part in the anniversary exhibition "20 Years at 10 Chancery Lane" in Hong Kong.

“A painting or an installation can be discussed in terms of techniques and materials, but a performance is not just something at the technical and material level. It is also about a person’s aura and ability to control a scene or site, as well as the artist’s resilience in the specific time and place, and the endurance of a human being.”

Xiao Lu

MATERIAL AND PRACTICE

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

My working in performance art is not the result of studying it, so this question of technique is one that I have had to work out for myself. The technical aspect of performance art is relatively complex. A painting or an installation can be discussed in terms of techniques and materials, but a performance is not just something at the technical and material level. It is also about a person's aura and ability to control a scene or site, as well as the artist's resilience in the specific time and place, and the endurance of a human being. The medium is a specific thing, and the best method of controlling a specific thing is to use it to stimulate your energy. For instance, when one chooses to use the medium of alcohol, one surrenders the right of control to it instead of to oneself.

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?

I have a plan each time I perform, but in the process of realisation it may change. For instance in the work *Skew*, according to the concept, another triangle would be formed by my momentum, and I would shatter the triangle in the process. However in the process of realising this on site, I discovered that that was impossible, and that I could only break out through one side. The result proved OK in the end. As for the time, the conditions are never the same for any work, so the time required is never the same. As for a performance item, I normally require about 3 months to prepare it. First one has to consider the site: is it indoors or out? Then I start planning and making sketches and considering with the curator the feasibility of implementing the details of the plan. In my experience in China, the plan is finalised and the preparatory work carried out in the last month before the performance. In Australia, more time is probably required. There are many uncertain factors in the realisation of a performance, so some of the draft plans for the performance will be changed on the spot.

For instance, the original plan for *Purge* (2013) was cancelled, and so I improvised by jumping in the canal in Venice. Indeterminacy is normal in performance art.

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

My main source of inspiration is my personal experience in life and in spirit. It is a sort of electromagnetic field induction that is produced in the collision between a spiritual person and some divine spirit in the universe.

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

At various times the original motive for me to make works is the various problems that come of the entangling of relationships that arise internally and externally. Secondly I consider the form of artistic expression in the work. In recent years the opportunities to create performance works have been relatively abundant, and the corresponding experiences likewise. As for the reaction that I hope my works will evoke in society, this is not a category that I consider. The interpretation of the works can only be left to time, society and history.

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

Usually I use ink-and-wash on xuan paper to retain images of the ideas, words or pictures that well forth out of my brain, and I retain words on my computer. I also am used to taking photographs. The work *Remember* in this exhibition is the first time that I appear in the form of documentary photography.

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

There are many artists that I like, but when I am creating, I don't want to think of anybody else. Inspiration is a mystery. It may be encountered but not be sought. Whenever it descends to us, there is excitement and joy that leads me onward. The perception of this world that survives, the experience of the insights that life brings me, the existence of artworks. These are just traces left in the journey of life.

Translated by Archibald McKenzie/WenZai 2021 04 12 version

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, Events

Forms – Digital, Documented Forms, Performance

KEY WORDS

Performance Art – a time-based artwork created when an artist completes a series of actions.

Documented Form – the documents that record an artwork, often the documents that record a performance. This could be photos, sound recordings or videos.



Xiao Lu, *Remember 1: Victoria Park, Hong Kong, June 4 candlelight vigil*.
Photo taken 4 June 2019, printed: 2021.
Digital print.



Xiao Lu, *Remember 2: protest march against the China extradition bill, Hong Kong.*
Photo taken 15 September 2019, printed: 2021.
Digital print

*“Inspiration is a mystery. It may be encountered but not
be sought.”*

Xiao Lu

QUESTIONS

STAGE 4

Xiao Lu's collection of works titled *Remember* is a response to pro-democracy demonstrations which took place in Hong Kong in 2019. *Remember* explores both the political situation in Hong Kong and Xiao Lu's personal experience participating in these demonstrations.

- Look carefully at the photograph *Victoria Park, Hong Kong, June 4 Candlelight Vigil* on page 12. Describe the mood Xiao Lu captured in this photograph.
- Explain how light helps to create the mood in this photograph.
- Look carefully at the photograph *Protest march against the China extradition bill*. Describe the mood Xiao Lu captured in this photograph.
- Explain how light colour, shape and repetition help to create the mood in this photograph.
- Look at the still image from the performance video *Skew*. Describe the way that you think the artist Xiao Lu feels in this image.

STAGE 5

- Xiao Lu has chosen the title *Remember* for her collection of photographs documenting pro-democracy demonstrations, the Candlelight Vigil commemorating the Tiananmen Square Incident in 1989 and her personal response to these events. Why do you think she selected the single word "remember" as the title for these works?
- How does the work *Remember* reflect Xiao Lu's personal history?



Xiao Lu, *Remember 3: Skew performance*, 10 Chancery Lane Gallery, Hong Kong, September 2019, Photographer: William Furniss. Video: Fred Cheung, Jiang Xiaoyang, Xiao Lu. Video edit: Xiao Lu. Video, Total duration: 3 minutes.

STAGE 6

The video *Skew* is a documentation of a performance work by Xiao Lu. She announces “This is for Hong Kong” before climbing into a sealed transparent pyramid. Audience members are able to pour red coloured water into the pyramid through a hole in the side. Once the pyramid is sealed Xiao Lu uses her body to break free, banging and pushing against the sides of the structure. After much struggle she is able to break free from the structure and lies exhausted, red water pouring out around her.

- Explore the ways in which this work symbolizes the political struggles experienced by citizens of Hong Kong?
- Why do you think Xiao Lu chose to perform in the video work *Skew* herself? Would this piece carry the same meaning if another person had performed it?
- How would the experience of audiences watching the performance live be different from those watching a recording of the performance?

DISCUSSION

- Think about the different political and cultural contexts of Australia and China. Do you think Xiao Lu’s work would be received differently in each country?

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Investigate how artists create a visual language of signs and symbols to create layers of meaning in their work.

Explore ways in which artists challenge their audiences to question traditional or mainstream points of view.

FURTHER RESOURCES

4A Centre for Contemporary
Asian Art 'Xiao Lu: Impossible
Dialogue
肖鲁: 语嘿'

[www.4a.com.au/xiao-lu-impossible-
dialogue/](http://www.4a.com.au/xiao-lu-impossible-dialogue/)

OCULA: Artist Profile Xiao Lu

<https://ocula.com/artists/xiao-lu/>

Museum Of Modern Art New
York. Art and Artist: Xiao Lu

www.moma.org/collection/works/114901

Artnet Artist: Xiao Lu

www.artnet.com/artists/xiao-lu/

Tate Museum:
'Women artist in contemporary
China: Xiao Lu'

[www.tate.org.uk/research/research-
centres/tate-research-centre-
asia/women-artists-contemporary-
china/xiao-lu](http://www.tate.org.uk/research/research-centres/tate-research-centre-asia/women-artists-contemporary-china/xiao-lu)

SupChina 'An artist and her gun
in 1989: Xiao Lu's accidental
revolt'

[https://supchina.com/2021/03/16/an-
artist-and-her-gun-in-1989-xiao-lus-
accidental-revolt/](https://supchina.com/2021/03/16/an-artist-and-her-gun-in-1989-xiao-lus-accidental-revolt/)

Artsy 'How the Tiananmen
Square protests forever
changed Chinese
Contemporary artist'

[https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-
editorial-tiananmen-square-protests-
forever-changed-chinese-contemporary-
artists](https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-tiananmen-square-protests-forever-changed-chinese-contemporary-artists)

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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Find us on:

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Instagram: [hurstvillemuseumgallery](https://www.instagram.com/hurstvillemuseumgallery)

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.

