



LI HUI, *Cage*, 2006–2014
green iodide lasers, fog machines, dimensions variable

LI HUI

THE ARTWORK

In the dark gallery space, green lasers flash on and off at random intervals, creating a grid-like structure made of light—a virtual cage. People inside the ‘cage’ feel as if they are physically trapped, but it’s all an illusion, a purely optical barrier. A fog machine produces a dreamlike haze that envelops the spectator. As in a bizarre scientific experiment, people ‘outside’ the cage observe the behaviour of those trapped ‘inside’ it. Then a new cage appears, and inside and outside change. The artist has made the audience part of the artwork.

THE ARTIST

I want to create feelings which cannot be expressed in language.’ —Li Hui

Li Hui is interested in fusing art with science and technology in order to convey truths about human beings and how we perceive our world. He was born in Beijing in 1977, and has grown up in a newly wealthy and materialistic society in China. This work makes us question what is real and what is an illusion. Trained as a sculptor using steel and wood, he began using LED light and laser beams because he believed they produced the magical feeling he wanted. Immersing the audience in his works is a deliberate decision: ‘My art is always interactive, and it gains meaning through interaction,’ he says.

THINK ABOUT

- Li Hui says, ‘You create feelings in art—if you can feel it, others will feel it too.’ Make a list of the feelings and thoughts that you had when you encountered *Cage*.
- What did you notice about how other people in the gallery responded to this work?
- This ‘cage’ of lasers can be interpreted in many ways—what kinds of real and imaginary cages does it suggest to us?
- The British artist Marc Quinn said, ‘I still think science is looking for answers and art is looking for questions.’ What questions are posed by Li Hui in this work?
- Why do you think Li Hui has chosen to use light in his art practice, rather than more conventional materials?
- WHAT IF YOU were planning an artwork using laser beams? What would you want to create, and would your work be shown in an art gallery or in a different kind of space? How would you hope that audiences would interact with your work?
- MAKING CONNECTIONS: Artists today use technology in diverse and often surprising ways, and many are interested in exploring aspects of science. Find out about Ken and Julia Yonetani and their work *What The Birds Knew*, which is made of bright green ‘uranium glass’ and UV light. Compare and contrast this work with Li Hui’s *Cage*. Other artists to explore include Stelarc, Patricia Piccinini and Cai Guo-Qiang.

NOTE TO TEACHERS: This resource is intended for use after your visit to White Rabbit, to prompt reflection, recollection, discussion and to inspire further research. The information and questions may be used in different ways with students of different ages, but are appropriate for Stages 3 to 6, as they can be discussed with greater or lesser complexity. Questions are sequenced from easier to more complex, but critical and creative thinking is definitely required!

PARADISE BITCH WHITE RABBIT GALLERY



XU ZHEN (Produced by Madeln Company), *Eternity*, 2013–2014,
glass-fibre-reinforced concrete, artificial stone, steel, mineral pigments, dimensions variable

XU ZHEN

THE ARTWORK

Xu Zhen works on a monumental scale to create this work that looks at first sight as if it has been removed from a museum of Greek antiquities. But wait—something strange is happening here! The heads of the Greek goddesses (modelled on statues from the east pediment of the Parthenon in Athens) have been replaced by upside-down Buddha figures from various periods in Chinese history. In a witty ‘mash-up’ of East and West, Xu Zhen asks us to consider how cultures interact. He plays with the traditions and conventions of figurative sculpture in surprising ways.

THE ARTIST

Eternity is concerned with the “fixed” point of view. Civilisation is constantly giving birth and inheriting through the process of creation. Only if you accept your own civilization, will you be able to realise that civilization has no boundaries.’ —Xu Zhen
Xu Zhen was born in 1977. He lives and works in Shanghai. In 2009, Xu Zhen founded Madeln Company, a contemporary art-creation ‘corporation’ that was not ashamed to admit that its members—like many successful contemporary artists—did not work alone in their studios, making works with their own hands. Madeln presented us with a new notion of the term ‘artist’. Although Xu Zhen continues to use the paid assistants of Madeln Company, he has resumed showing his work under his own name.

THINK ABOUT:

- Is your experience of the work different from different angles? What about looking down on the work from the stairs?
- Describe the relationship between the sculpture and the space in the gallery. Why do you think the curator chose to place it here on the ground floor?
- Xu Zhen is sometimes described as a provocateur (a person who provokes trouble). Do you think this artwork is challenging or provocative? How?
- What do you think is Xu Zhen’s intention with *Eternity*? How would he want audiences to respond to this work?
- WHAT IF the figures were the other way around, and the Greek statues were placed upside down on Buddha figures? Would the work have a different meaning?
- MAKING CONNECTIONS: Xu Zhen is not the first artist to produce works in collaboration with a ‘corporation’. Find out about Pop artist Andy Warhol’s ‘Factory’ and make some deductions about similarities and differences between the two approaches.

PARADISE BITCH WHITE RABBIT GALLERY

BU HUA

THE ARTWORKS

Flash digital animations including: *Cat*, 2002, *Youth Does Harm to Your Health*, 2007, *Last Phases of the Future*, 2007, *Savage Growth*, 2008, *Anxiety*, 2009, *LV Forest*, 2010

Bu Hua was one of the first contemporary artists in China to grasp the potential of multimedia platforms such as Flash for creating narrative artworks. Her animations tell stories, such as the heart-wrenching tale of a kitten who travels through the underworld in search of his mother in *Cat*, or present surreal dreamscapes like the designer-label nightmare of *LV Forest*. Bu Hua's main heroine is a feisty pigtailed girl wearing the uniform of the Young Pioneers, a Communist youth group—a reference to the artist herself as a child. In *Savage Growth* this alter ego takes aim with a slingshot at ominous white birds that are also military aircraft. They fall to earth, but not before they have destroyed flocks of flapping white hands, a nightmare vision of meaningless destruction. In *LV Forest* the schoolgirl dances demurely to a video-game soundtrack, then rides like a triumphant warrior on a skeletal beast. A landscape of uncontrolled development and industrial pollution forms the backdrop to many of her works. Bu Hua says: 'In *Savage Growth*, I am showing what is happening in China.' It is a bleak vision of a world in which the promises of wealth and abundant consumerism have turned very sour.

THE ARTIST

'On the surface it's very cute and very lovely, but underneath there is anxiety and pressure.' —Bu Hua, about her animations

Born in 1973 into a family of artists, Bu Hua says she 'learned the language of lines' at an early age watching her father make woodcut prints. The crisp, flat style of her digital animations and still images owes much to the influence of Chinese and Japanese woodblock prints, but she also loves Japanese anime and manga, traditional Chinese folk art, video games, and the TV cartoons of the 1980s. Her engaging characters inhabit a seductively beautiful and weird

THINK ABOUT:

How is the style of *Cat* different from that of the later works? Which do you prefer, and why?

How does the artist use line and colour to convey powerful emotions?

How are Bu Hua's animations different from conventional cartoons or animated movies produced by companies such as Pixar or Disney? What makes them 'art'?

Can you detect visual influences from other artworks, or from graphic design, fashion and popular culture, in her works?

The artist says she is representing what is happening in China today. What issues and concerns do you think she is referring to? What symbolism does she use to represent aspects of her world?

Bu Hua is interested in blurring the boundaries between art and design – for example, she wants to produce handbags and homewares printed with her imagery. What other products do you think should feature her designs, and how should they be marketed?

What if Bu Hua made an animation that featured YOU as the main character? What kind of imaginary world would you inhabit, and what journey of discovery would you undertake? Making connections:

Bu Hua began to make animations after she discovered the work of the South African artist William Kentridge. Research his unusual method of making stop-frame animations, drawing with charcoal, erasing and redrawing, over and over again. In contrast, Zhang Xiaotao's *The Adventure of Liang Liang* digitally animates the wonderful drawings of the artist's little son, taking a Snoopy-like character (also wearing the red scarf of a Young Pioneer) on a wild ride through Chinese history and the traffic snarls and airport security lines of today. Compare the style and content of his work (which can be viewed online) with Bu Hua's.

BU HUA
Savage Growth, (still), 2008, flash animation, 3'52"



ZHANG DALI

THE ARTWORK

The title *Square* refers to the vast, heavily policed space of Tiananmen Square in Beijing, once the site of student protests that ended in a massacre in 1989. Zhang Dali was there. He created this work to commemorate the events of that time, which cannot be openly discussed in China. Instead of the usual tourists, undercover police and soldiers, we see humble white figures at rest, standing or slumped, with pigeons on their heads, arms and shoulders. Zhang Dali made plaster moulds of poor migrant workers and then cast them in resin, so that we see every detail of their care-worn faces and crumpled clothing. The people hired by the artist had to close their eyes while their faces were cast. As a result, they seem to be lost in their own thoughts, oblivious to the birds fluttering around them. The pigeons—which are absent from central Beijing thanks to a series of extermination campaigns—represent freedom, spirituality and hope, says the artist.

THE ARTIST

'We are all wandering ghosts who have lost their homeland.'
—Zhang Dali

Zhang Dali used to be one of China's most famous street artists, protesting the demolition of old buildings by spray-painting a very recognisable face silhouette on their crumbling walls. Born in Harbin in 1963, he now lives and works in Beijing. He is still inspired by the life of the streets, but now he works with sculpture, photography, printmaking and painting. Zhang Dali makes artworks that comment on aspects of contemporary China that are unpleasant or hidden from view. He draws attention to people who are marginalised and sometimes forgotten. For these sculptures, he hired ten of the poor workers from rural villages who eke out a living by labouring on big-city construction sites, and made casts of their bodies and faces. The blue 'oil paint on cyanotype' image of pigeons in flight adds another dimension.



THINK ABOUT:

- How are the figures placed in the space of the gallery? Why do you think they have been arranged in this way?
- What do you think the whiteness of the birds and human figures symbolises?
- Zhang Dali has been described as a courageous artist whose work 'speaks up for those who cannot speak for themselves'. What are some of the key ideas in this work?
- A cyanotype is a type of photographic image made by a process first used in the 19th century. Zhang Dali makes cyanotypes by placing objects such as stuffed birds onto a sheet of cloth coated with a light-sensitive chemical and exposing the cloth to light. The light turns the cloth bright (cyan) blue. In this case, the artist added oil paint to some parts of the surface. Why use such a labour-intensive process instead of a digital photograph? What is the effect of the cyanotype and how does it contribute to the meaning of *Square*?
- WHAT IF Zhang Dali had instead painted all the figures in *Square* in 'realistic' bright colours? How would the meaning and atmosphere of the work be different?
- MAKING CONNECTIONS: The American Pop artist George Segal also made life-size white plaster casts of figures and placed them into strange environments. Find some examples of his work and account for some differences and similarities between the two artists.

ZHANG DALI
Square, 2014
resin, 10 pcs, various dimensions
Square, 2014
oil paint on cyanotype,
145 x 225 cm

