

Fukuoka Asian Art Museum Best Collection III

Breaking the Conventional: New Self-Portraits

An object that connotes
the West and masculinity:

The pipe

A thing that evokes
a sense of femininity

Long hair

A traditional Vietnamese
female dress:

The ao dai



Hanh Thi Pham[Vietnam/US] Self Portrait/Hairy/Pipe 1985

The Beyond Visual Guide

A guidebook to provide hints to help you further appreciate each work of art.



福岡アジア美術館
Fukuoka Asian Art Museum

When looking at works of Asian art, we often unexpectedly encounter motifs that make us wonder, "What on earth is this?"

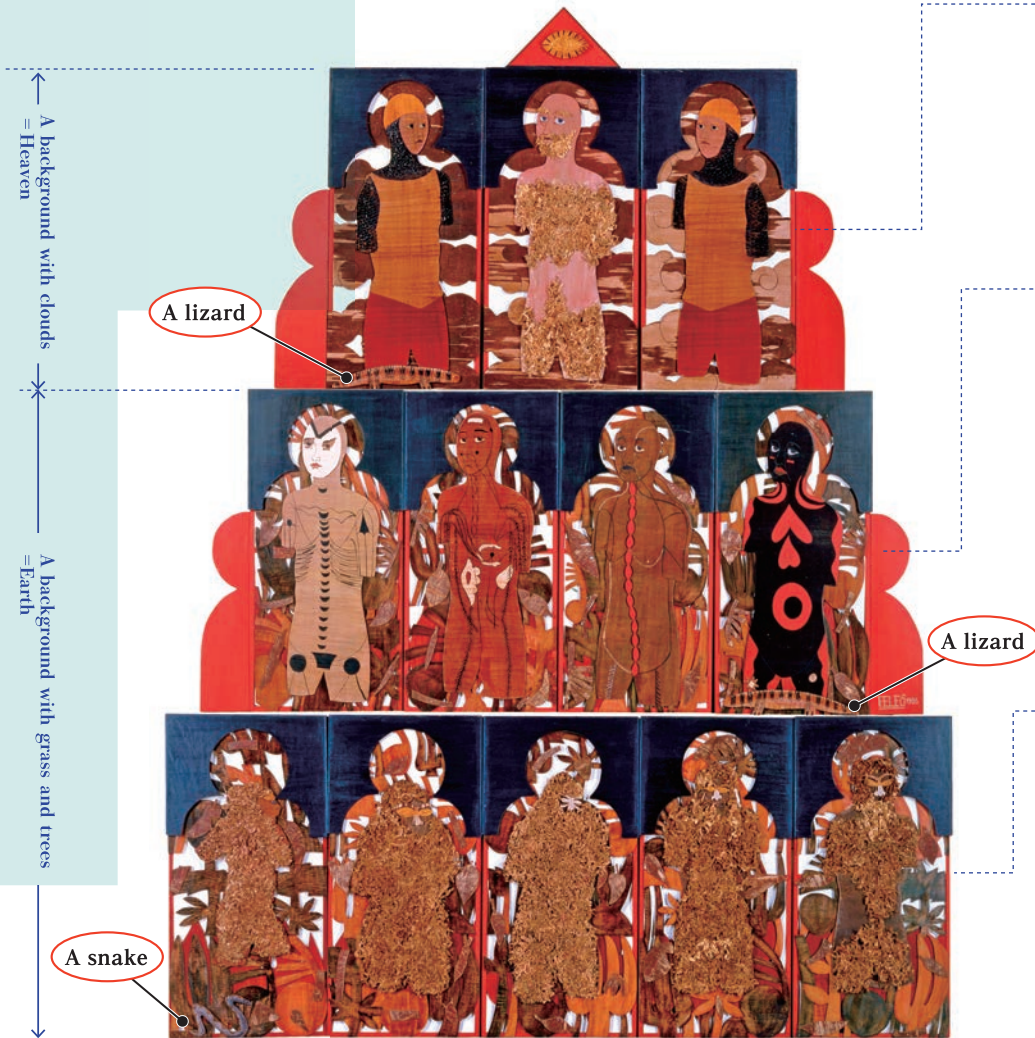
The history and mythology of each region, religious symbols, the artist's personal experiences... if you do not know about the local contexts behind each work, then you may feel lost. However, one of the fascinating things about encountering Asian art is that by understanding the specific context of each work the world visible to you will broaden.

We hope that this guide will aid you in further appreciating the plentitude of each work of art.



The work is shaped as a Christian altarpiece...

However, what it depicts is the hierarchy between white people, people of color, and human-shaped figures.



Character Assigned to an Important Mission are Discovered!

The Lizard Separates heaven and earth in Filipino myths.

The Snake A servant of spirit in the Philippines while it comes and goes between the underground and the overground

Both deliver the words of the God and work as interpreters between the classes

Title

The Altar of the Dark Side of Spain

Upper Side

Body hairs made from sawdust

In the center is the "white god," while the "angels" stand on both sides

Angels Disguised as Soldiers

They symbolize Spain which carried out its colonization policy through missionary work.

Middle

People of color who experienced colonization, including Filipinos

Their skin is rendered in different colors

Tattoos on the Body

Indigenous people in the Philippines had a tradition of tattooing their bodies. For this reason, the Spanish settlers named them *Pintado* ("painted"). Feleo often portrayed the *Pintado* as a symbol of the pre-colonial Philippines, representing them as innocent subjects.

Lower side

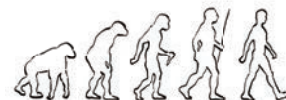
Evolving "human-like" figures, as Described in Darwin's Evolution Theory

Made from sawdust

Evolution Theory, Racism, and Colonial Rule

The theory of evolution was invoked to justify racism and colonization.

However, if we look at the whole altarpiece, the "human-like" figures at the bottom and the "white god" on the highest level are connected as they are both made with sawdust. In this way, the work satirizes racism and the colonial theory of ranking people.



1985

acrylic and sawdust on wood 391.3×311.1cm

The work takes the form of a Catholic altarpiece, featuring a white person represented as God on top, under which people of color are put under the rule of colonization. The evolution of the pre-human species is depicted in the lowest section. The work reveals racial hierarchy and the mechanism of colonial rule through religious power.

Artist

Roberto Feleo

Philippines 1954-

About the Artist

Feleo visualizes stories of the Philippines, a country with a long history of colonization. Using various materials such as sawdust and grass, his work tells folktales and myths, illustrating the stories of people under historical oppression.

It's linked to the Concept of the Artwork!

The Special Technique of Feleo

sapin-sapin

Sapin-sapin is an artistic technique of layering flat materials such as wooden panels. Named after a desert made from multi-layered rice cakes, it has often been used as a metaphor for Filipino culture, influenced by foreign cultures.



pinalakpak

This is a technique of making putty using sawdust and glue. Artisans in the Philippines have long employed this tradition to repair cracks and for other such purposes.

① Materials and techniques common in the Philippines

Their use reflects the artwork's concept of exploring the character of local cultures.

② Practicality

Light weight, affordable, and easy to shape, it can be used as an alternative to clay.

③ Sawdust as an organic material

Perfect to knead soil and clay to create humans in folktales and myths.

Modes of Parallel Practices; Ways of World Making

1997

wood, rubber tubes, pigment, cushion

780×1250×500 cm (dimensions variable)

This is an installation piece, featuring carved wooden poles and female figures, made by a contemporary artist, Navjot, and three Indigenous artisans. The collaboration work transcended boundaries of contemporary art and traditional crafts, and attempted to create another world that could not be visualized without the other part.

Artist

Collaboration between Navjot, Rajkumar, Shantibai and Gaslam

India

About the Artist

Navjot, based in the big city of Mumbai, reconsiders social norms through the perspective of people who suffer from inequality and oppression. Rajkumar, Shantibai, and Gaslam are indigenous artisans who create stone and wood carvings. They are based in the forest belt of Bastar, a district in central India. Their works represent people's struggle in their home village, which has been affected by developmental projects.



The Stage of Collaboration

The Bastar District

Located in central India, many indigenous people live in the forest of Bastar. They use various kinds of tall trees, suitable for sculpture, to make deity figures, furniture, and wall decorations. Residents in this region continued to collectively protest against British colonial rule. Even after India gained independence in 1947, they continued fight against discrimination within the caste system as well as the developmental policy of the state.

These seven dynamic and hefty female figures are carved from large, solid, and heavy trees. Each sculpture weighs 80 kilograms, and was made through the collaborative work of Navjot (female) and Gaslam (male). They are painted in yellow and blue. The vivid primary colors highlight people placed in vulnerable conditions, as they never fail to catch the viewer's attention with their striking visual effect.

In India ...

yellow

represents wellness, prosperity, and sanctity.

blue

represents eternity and the power to defeat evil.

Some Hindu deities are illustrated with blue skin such as Krishna

Women in this work are painted with indigo pigment. Indigo alludes to colonial rule, exploitation, as well as to resistance movements in Indian history. This is because it symbolizes the indigo plantations that were controlled by the British during its colonization of India. This was met with protest.



Six wooden poles

Each of them was made by Rajkumar (male) and Shantibai (female), illustrating stories heard from their grandparents, as well as their own experiences and reveries.

A Yellow Female Figure

In this work, *Whitening the White of the White*, a woman is **cleansing a sanitary pad** after her menstruation, one of her mundane routines. Women during menstruation may be referred to as "impure" in India. In some regions they are denied access to temples or to the kitchen in their homes.

Blue Female Figures

Each piece has a different title; *Looking Through Binoculars*, *Watching*, *Listening*, *Speaking*, *Indulging in the Fantasy to Fly*, and *Home and the World*. **These women who are living under restrictive conditions in their cultural and local environment are nurturing their dreams, as they engage with the outside of their normal life.**

Distinctive from sculptures in Western Art

Boldly rendered naked women sit comfortably on the floor, instead of being placed on plinths as commonly seen in Western sculpture. The one on the left looks back at the viewers through binoculars as she poses questions about the way female statues are treated as "objects to be seen."

Seven Female Statues

Title

Document on Hygiene: No.3

1991
video (36min. 49sec., silent)

A chicken is put into a bowl and gets washed endlessly on screen. Despite looking resistant at first, it gradually becomes quiet and eventually lets itself be controlled. The chicken may resemble humans, who gradually turn insensitive and non-resistant as they face pressure or intervention in society.

Artist

Zhang Peili

China 1957-

About the Artist

Zhang was among the earliest to employ video in his art and has presented numerous outstanding video works since the late 1980s, which earned him the title the "Father of Video Art in China." In the early 2000s, Zhang launched a new academy course at the China Academy of Art for the study of new media. It has produced many leading figures in the contemporary art scenes. Zhang, as a prominent educator, made a huge contribution to nurturing the next generations of artists.

The chicken looks perplexed and rebellious at first; however, it slowly stops resisting and eventually becomes obedient



Endless Wash

The work shows a chicken being washed from head to toe with soapy water, including the inner sides of its wings. It is based on China's "Patriotic Health Campaign," according to Zhang.



*The Patriotic Health Campaign
A campaign to improve public sanitation in China, carried out by the government since the 1950s. It was initially launched as a measure to prevent infectious diseases, pests, and vermin. It was later written in the constitution that the campaign was "to develop public sanitation to protect people's health."
◀Artist Unknown
To clean is glorious; to not clean is shameful. Follow the Patriotic Covenant on Sanitation and supervise one another.
1960, Collection of Fukuoka Asian Art Museum

The Chicken

Zhang described the reason why the chicken is being washed: "People commonly think that chickens dislike water" and that "washing them is considered strange." At the same time, he adds, "In fact, no one knows what the chicken feels when it is being washed in water."

Extended shots of simple actions

Zhang often employed repetitive scenes of simple actions in his early video works.

- Crush a mirror on the ground, collect its broken pieces to restore the shape, then drop it again and restore it, and repeat the process
- Washing a chicken in soaped water
- Scratching a part of a human body, etc.

Does it symbolize Absurdity and Insanity in Contemporary Society?

Did the artist consider the characteristics of video to be a way to document the movement of time and the transformation of conditions?

What's on the chicken's mind as it is getting washed continuously?

Title

Battle of Mara

1989

oil and enamel on canvas 176.2×285 cm

The face of Shakyamuni Buddha meditating floats in the center of the painting. He is surrounded by servants of Mara, the Demon King. They embody earthly desires and seek to prevent him from attaining enlightenment. In this work violence and tranquility coexist, pioneering new forms of expression that transcend the traditional Buddhist worldview.

Artist

Thawan Duchanee

Thailand 1939-2014

The work goes beyond traditional Buddhist ideas to depict the madness, death, violence, and eroticism that lurk deep within humans. Its bold patterns, dynamic brushstrokes, and energetic expression create a fantastical world that shocked the Thai art community.

What is the Battle of Mara?

In Buddhism, this is the scene of the trials that Shakyamuni Buddha faced just before his enlightenment. **While meditating to attain enlightenment, he was subjected to various temptations and attacks from Mara, the Demon King.** This work depicts Shakyamuni's internal struggle as he sought to overcome his inner worldly attachments and passions.

This scene has repeatedly been the subject of traditional Buddhist paintings, known as the "Suppression of Mara" The basic composition of these paintings, with Shakyamuni in the center and Mara's messengers surrounding him, is the same as in this work.

Shakyamuni's expression

Shakyamuni's eyes are pointed down and half-open. This expresses the internal concentration and meditation he used to overcome Mara.

A traditional subject with

The depiction of Shakyamuni

Thawan does not depict Shakyamuni's full body, but instead depicts his facial expression boldly in the center of the painting, revealing his internal state. This style is unique to Thawan and differs from the traditional methods of depicting Shakyamuni.



Mara's attacks

To confuse Shakyamuni's mind and disturb his meditation, Mara launched various attacks, using beautiful women, terrifying demons (the messengers of Mara depicted in this work), rocks, and weapons.

The menacing appearance of Mara's servants

The chimerical figures, half man and half beast, attack the Buddha with bared fangs, brandishing weapons. Mara's servants are muscular, with patterns on their legs that resemble the eyes of beasts. This style of depiction is unique to Thawan.



Incidentally, half-naked, muscular men and ferocious animals are frequent motifs in Thawan's works.

a unique expression breaks convention

Sook Ching (Purge)

Painting 1989 oil on gunny sack

Video 1989-90 27min.

Both works depict the purge of Chinese in the Malay Peninsula (the extermination of people of Chinese descent. Also known as the Sook Ching Incident). This was conducted between 1942 and 1945 by the Japanese occupation forces. The painting was inspired by Picasso's *Guernica*. The video features testimonies, photographs, and newspapers that describe the situation at the time, with a documentary-like touch.

Wong Hoy Cheong

Malaysia 1960-

About the Artist

As someone born and raised in the multi-ethnic country of Malaysia, Wong's interest particularly lies in multi-ethnic and multicultural societies, and his art often draws on the history surrounding colonialism. Wong attempts to disclose hidden narratives resulting from historical contexts or complex power relations and re-illustrates these narratives through a contemporary lens, encompassing a new way of comprehension and expression.

"The accusers were hooded. Their faces were covered and they pointed at people. Once you were pointed at, you'd be executed."

An accuser wearing a balaclava, points at people



A woman screams while holding her child

The slumped child looks almost unconscious. *Guernica*, which inspired this piece, also features a woman crying out with her child in her arms.

People trying to escape

In Ipoh, there were sirens. But in Pusing, they beat the gongs. Once you heard them, you had to disperse.

I just ran. I didn't even know what those sounds were. I was very scared and everybody was running.

The person holding a bayonet, who looks like a Japanese soldier

At the camps, they recorded our names and interrogated us: How old are you? Have you been to school? I said I hadn't. I pretended to be illiterate. Then they beat me up till I was half-dead... and threw me into the cell.

The concentration camp and imprisoned people

At that time, I had wanted to die, I would rather have died than to be in prison in such conditions.

Most people died after 2 or 3 months. However, even after 3 months in prison, I couldn't die. But I was very thin, just skin and bones.

They also hanged me for 3 weeks...from 8 am to 5 or 6 pm. I would be hanging from a tree.



An Imprisoned Father

The artist's father was among those imprisoned in the concentration camp during the purge of Chinese in the Malay Peninsula. Wong visualized his father's experience in his later video work *Doghole* (2009).

※All testimonies written in quotation marks are excerpts from the video work *Sook Ching* (1989-90)

Title

Horn Chase

1991

pencil on paper 188x101cm

Rhinos face the risk of extinction, as their horns are highly valued as an ingredient for traditional herbal medicine. As someone of a Chinese descent, Tang Da Wu reconsiders his ethnic culture, as it may promote the poaching of wild animals. Through versatile works such as drawing and performances, the artist questions the selfish acts carried out by humans.

Artist

Tang Da Wu

Singapore 1943-

About the Artist

While exploring his identity as a Chinese Singaporean, Tan Da Wu highlights globally shared social and environmental issues through interactive performance and installation with daily objects. Tang also organizes The Artist's Village, which works as a space for collaborations and artistic presentations.



Poachers kill rhinos to get their precious horns. Networks of poachers and some illegal groups hire disadvantaged local people to get involved in their crimes of poaching and trafficking wild animals. Poaching has been an issue since the 1990s, when this work was produced, to this day.

Rhino seekers



Reconstructed Horn from Rhino Drink 1989

Antique herbal medicine containing rhino horn is believed to cure every type of disease, from cancer to diabetes. Despite lacking scientific evidence as to their medical effect, they are treated as special gifts in some countries, such as China and Vietnam. The work recreates a rhino horn from medicine bottles, implying that the traditional culture of herbal medicine is contributing to rhino poaching.

The realities about rhinos

Black rhinos in Botswana almost became extinct in the 1990s, and white rhinos also remain in very small numbers. Rhino horns are sold at a higher price than diamonds. Sometimes it is more than a few million yen for just one piece. To prevent their extinction, the international trade of products made from rhinos and those that contain their parts is prohibited under the Washington Convention.



A Cut in Time Saves Life 1989

To prevent poaching, work to dehorn rhinos is carried out in nature reserves and national parks. Rhinos have their horns cut off before poachers get to them, which as a result, saves their lives. Their horns will grow again after they are cut off, like nails, and it does not hurt the rhinos.



Botswana Sad Song 1989

The people who try to save rhinos

Series 2 No.3

1992

oil on canvas 200×200cm

Figures line up across an unnamed bright blue sky, all with nearly identical faces, wearing the same clothes, and striking identical poses. Their faces sport uncanny, empty smiles. This bizarre and surreal scene evokes the social atmosphere of an era in which ideals have been shattered.

Artist

Fang Lijun

China 1963-

About the Artist

Fang experienced the Cultural Revolution and the Tiananmen Square incident during his childhood and time as a student, and, through these experiences, he became extremely dissatisfied with society and humanity. This set him apart from the older generation, who were wrapped up in idealism. He is widely known for his symbolic portrayals of modern society and the people who live within it. These include groups of bald men who appear to have lost their sense of meaning and figures helplessly adrift in water.

Cynical Realism

A renowned Chinese critic identifies this movement as an important trend in Chinese art in the "Post-1989" era, following the setbacks caused by the Tiananmen Square incident.

Rejection of idealism and heroism/Cynical attitude and expression/Portrayal of life's mundanity

➡ **Cynical Realism gained recognition in the international art scene and became the emblem of contemporary Chinese art.**
Fang Lijun is considered one of its leading artists



The experiences that underlie Fang Lijun's ideas and his view of humanity

The Cultural Revolution (1966–1976, as a child)

- The political conflicts and movements led by Mao Zedong brought great chaos to Chinese society.
- Fang, coming from a landowning family, suffered harsh treatment from those around him.
- At a memorial service for Mao, Fang cried dramatically. This was contrary to his own feelings, but he received praise from his teachers.



The Tiananmen Square incident (1989, as a student)

- A youth movement calling for systemic change was violently suppressed by state forces.
- Fang participated in the movement as a student in Beijing and witnessed its tragic outcome.



Who are they?

Uncanny grins

These grins reveal a cynical attitude toward society. Their stance belies an attitude of not truly believing in any ideals or in any ideologies.

Baldness

Most of Fang Lijun's figures have shaved heads. He says that this is perfect for representing those who have lost their individuality.

A somewhat surreal blue sky

The work feels at odds with reality and is not grounded in a specific place.

Fang himself has a shaved head, so the figures can also be seen as self-portraits.



Where are they?

Ambiguous figures

Figures repeat like copies

Perhaps they symbolize people who have lost their individuality. They also seem to suggest that society oppresses people into behaving uniformly.

Familiar clothing

They sport a typical clothing combination for Chinese men of that era. Leather jackets were a popular item in China in the 1990s.

If you look carefully, the shapes of their faces and their expressions are all slightly different, suggesting that they may in fact be different people. Nevertheless, they remain almost indistinguishable.

An ambiguous space

What is a Korean family tree?

It is a record of a single family's genealogy. It records the names, birth and death dates, and achievements of each family member from the family's origins to the present, following the patriarchal line.

In the past, based on Confucian ideas, family trees as a rule did not record women's names. A woman's family tree recorded only her husband's surname, while her husband's family tree recorded only her family name.

Wives in the patriarchal system

In South Korea, husbands and wives traditionally have separate surnames, with women keeping their surnames after marriage and their children taking their father's surname. This custom is based on patriarchal and Confucian ideas, which stipulate that a wife should not be added to her husband's patrilineal family line. However, at the same time, wives face heavy pressure to give birth to boys to be heirs to the family line.

The possibility of social change

In the early 2000s, the system requiring children to take their father's surname was revised, providing the alternative option for children to legally receive their mother's surname. However, this requires an application at the time of marriage, so the father's surname still takes precedence. Discussions are currently underway regarding further legal reform.

The hanged wife

Title

Genealogy

1993 acrylic on wood and photocopied paper
320×279.4×97.5cm

Korean family trees (the genealogical record of a single family) are recorded along patrilineal lines, and therefore the names of wives are not included. This work depicts the suffering of "nameless" women living in a patriarchal society by juxtaposing the figure of a model bride with that of a hanged woman against the text of a family tree.

Artist

Yun Suknam

South Korea 1939-

About the Artist

Yun is one of the leading figures in feminist art in Korea. She draws attention to those who have been overlooked and marginalized by society throughout history. Her subjects include her own mother, abandoned dogs, and Korean women's liberation movements.

A family tree forms the background

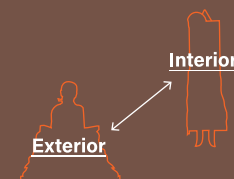
A symbol of the senselessness of patriarchal systems

In the family tree, women's personal names are erased, and they are included only by reference to their relationships with men—such as their father, husband, or son.

The family tree used here is that of the noble family of Suncheon Park clan.

What is the relationship between these two wives?

Yun Suknam says they represent a woman's **interior and exterior**.



From the hardships of her patriarchal family, she hangs.

Acting with elegance and form, befitting a wife of a noble family.

Wood as a material

Yun Suknam often uses **discarded wood** as a material for her work. She finds a similarity between the existence of **those relegated to the margins of society** and these materials, which are regarded as trash.

The well composed wife

Title

Self Portrait/Hairy /Pipe

1985

gelatine silver print 101.2×75.7cm

This self-portrait, which seems simple at first glance, reflects both Pham's own identity and the stereotypical views to which she is subjected by society. Her expression and gaze reveal her determination to confront social oppression head-on, holding on to her convictions even in the face of adversity.

Artist

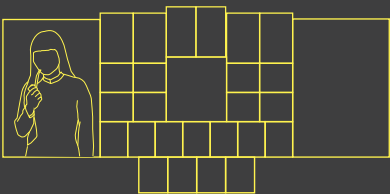
Hanh Thi Pham

Vietnam / US 1954-

About the Artist

Hanh Thi Pham emigrated from Vietnam to the United States with her family toward the end of the Vietnam War. The self-portrait is the mainstay of her art, which explores the themes of identity crisis and anti-Asian discrimination that she experienced while living as an immigrant in America. After coming out as gay, she also actively expresses her lesbian identity in her work.

FAAM memo



This piece was initially exhibited as part of a collection called *The Four Thousand Years of Revolution* (1985–96), which combined photographs, line drawings, and other elements, but it has since become a standalone piece.

A thing that evokes
a sense of femininity

Long hair

Black hair is also thought of as "Asian."



While they are an important part of her **identity**, they are also features that are subject to **prejudice based on stereotypes**.



A traditional **Vietnamese**
female dress:

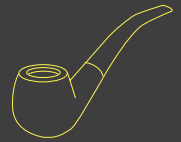
The ao dai

The ao dai frequently appears in Hanh Thi Pham's work from the 1980s. Pham says the ao dai is the elegant national dress that represents Vietnamese culture and a symbol of femininity. She adds, "As a refugee who has sacrificed my original identity, when I think of Vietnamese things, I have inescapable thoughts of the ao dai."

White is a symbol of "simplicity" and "nobility."

Her direct gaze

Her direct gaze locks onto and returns the various prejudices to which she is subject, and it shows us **her unwavering determination to follow her own will**.



An object that connotes
the **West and masculinity:**

The pipe

This pipe was actually lovingly used by Hanh at the time. The idea for this piece came from her noticing her pipe's striking resemblance to the pipe depicted in Belgian painter Magritte's work, *The Treachery of Images*.

This work sketches the image of a "typical Vietnamese woman" while also alluding to the treachery of images.



René Magritte, *The Treachery of Images*, 1929

Collection of Los Angeles County Museum of Art (Image from the museum's website, www.lacma.org)
© C. Herscovici/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

Under the image of a pipe, the text reads, "This is not a pipe." This work explores the relationship between image, reality, and words.

Title

Book from the Sky

1987-91

woodcut on paper 49.3×33.3×10cm

The characters in this book are fabrications, created based on Chinese characters. By stripping meaning from the book and presenting only its form, the work asks us to consider the existence of Chinese characters and books, which both governed and defined Chinese people's thought and communication. In doing so, the work attempts to closely reexamine Chinese civilization.

Artist

Xu Bing

China 1955-

About the Artist

Xu gained international recognition as an artist through his series themed around characters. His early masterpiece, *Book from the Sky*, is considered a monumental work that marked a step toward a form of self-expression that only contemporary Chinese artists could create for themselves. Since moving to the United States in the early 1990s, he has engaged in a wide range of activities centered on exploring the relationship between meaning and symbols, while also examining the mutuality between Eastern and Western civilizations.

Grain from the sky!?

The strange occurrence upon the creation of Chinese characters

There is a Chinese legend that says when Chinese characters were invented, **heaven rained down grain**. Some see this occurrence as a blessing for the great invention, but others interpret it differently, with some believing that, with the birth of writing, humans began to deceive others and stopped working in the fields, which had been their original occupation. For them, heaven sent down grain in lament.

Book from the Sky was created with these considerations in mind, including the advantages and drawbacks of this kind of cultural technology and the complex feelings Chinese people have toward Chinese characters.



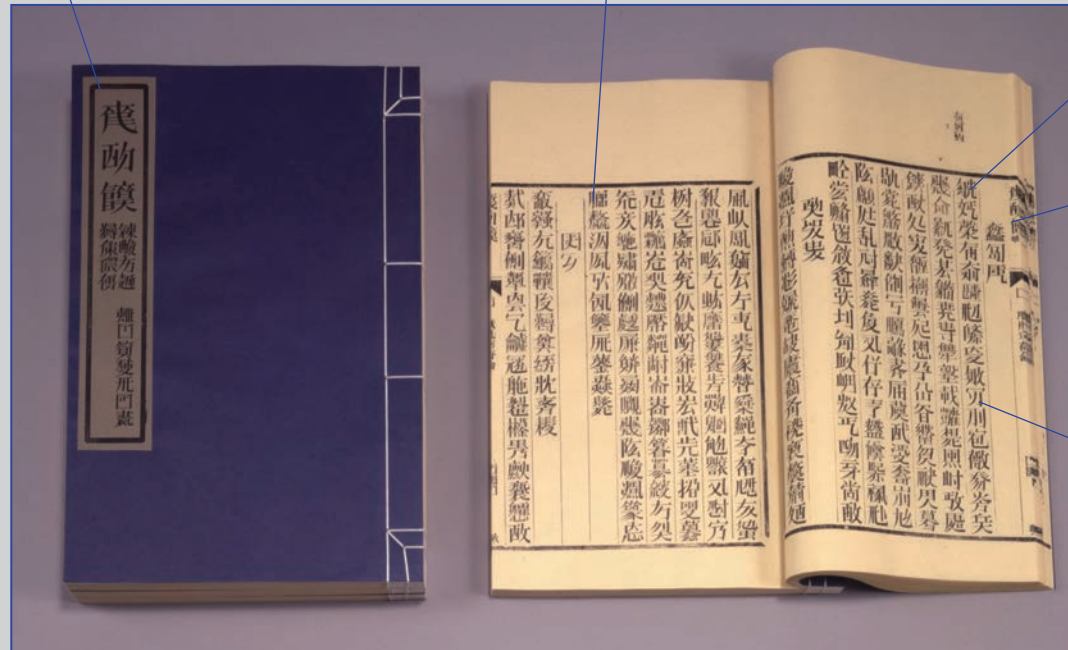
A book of astounding quality that

Fabricated characters with no meaning

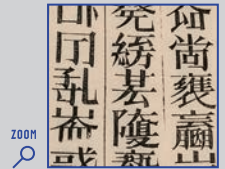
The characters are created using the preexisting components that structure Chinese characters, so although they resemble Chinese characters, they are in fact not genuine, with each character having no meaning or way to be pronounced.

The number of characters

Xu's fabricated characters total approximately 4,000. He created this many because there is a similar number of Chinese characters in everyday use.



no one can read.



The typeface

The typeface used here is "Song style," a formal style used in official documents. It is also known as "government style."

The book format

Xu created this book in strict adherence to the traditional book format. The title, preface, postscript, contents, explanatory notes, and page numbering are all reproduced accurately.

But we cannot read them...

Moveable type printing

Each page of the book is printed using moveable type. Xu carved each character with his own hand onto a single block of wood and arranged them to produce the text.



It is notable that Xu originally majored in printmaking.

Actually, there were many!

Chinese Character Reformers

There are many great figures in Chinese history who brought about great change to Chinese characters.

Cangjie is thought to be the ancient sage who created Chinese characters

Emperor **Qin Shi Huang** standardized the various script styles used across different territories.

Empress **Wu Zetian** created a number of new characters called the Zetian Characters.

Mao Zedong implemented the use of simplified forms of characters through his language reforms.

There were also those who advocated for the abolition of Chinese characters, such as the modern writer Lu Xun who once said, "If Chinese characters do not perish, China will surely perish."

Book from the Sky was created during a time when young Chinese artists were repeatedly experimenting and seeking new cultural forms. With his characters, which are not understood by anyone, was Xu attempting to write a page in the long history of his predecessors who had continually contended with Chinese characters?

Cangjie, the inventor of Chinese characters
He has four eyes!



Artist Gets Obsessed

1991

oil and paper on canvas 149.3x149.3 cm

This strange three-eyed monster represents the artist himself. He gazes into a mirror in which he sees his original face. Dono represents his obsession with success in the form of a monster, while also depicting the figure of the artist as a social outsider.

Artist

Heri Dono

Indonesia 1960-

About the Artist

Incorporating elements of traditional art styles, such as the shadow puppet theater, wayang kulit, Dono produces works imbued with humor and sharp social criticism. He creates paintings, installations that encourage viewer participation, and performances in collaboration with various experts.



Is selling art a failure?

The social context in which this work was created

Heri Dono grew up under the Suharto regime (1967–98). It was a time of economic growth, but widespread authoritarian rule and violence was endemic. Artist Gets Obsessed was created during this time.

Heri Dono recalls that in Indonesia in the 1980s and early 1990s, **an artist selling their work was seen as a sign of losing their ideals and becoming a commercial painter.**

On the other hand, there were also artists who believed that there was no problem with buying and selling their work as long as it was an artist's own work, and they had painted it voluntarily. Heri Dono apparently struggled with this dilemma.

A strange monster

= An artist possessed by his desire for success

A gun from his head, a sword from his mouth

The gun coming out of the monster's head is firing at a plate of food. According to Heri Dono, food is necessary to live, yet, claiming "I don't need food," he is about to destroy it.

A symbol of the artist's pride superseding his own survival?

A goat in his stomach

In Indonesia, goats are often used in jokes and insults. They are thought to have a restless disposition.

A stream of urine and a hand catching it

Heri Dono says he drinks his own urine because he can't find water to help with digestion.



A mirror in his hand

The artist is reflected in the mirror in his human form. The reflection resembles the real Heri Dono, with his long hair tied back.

A man and woman on top of a pair of legs

Are they successful people with families?

The man holds an alcoholic drink in one hand and reaches toward the woman's breast with the other.

Maybe this symbolizes various desires.

A design that reflects tradition

The characters' side profiles are flat and make one think of **the puppets in the traditional Indonesian shadow puppet theater, wayang kulit.** Heri Dono also studied under a wayang puppeteer.



Sharp criticism and endearing humor:

Many of Heri Dono's works offer derisive comments on social conditions and power. However, the imaginary characters that appear within them are endearing, humorous, and somehow it is impossible to dislike them. Wayang kulit, which has influenced his work, also has the inherent function of scathingly handling current political and social themes through storytelling.

Fukuoka Asian Art Museum Best Collection III Breaking the Conventional: New Self-Portraits

List of Works

Artist	Work Title	Country/Region	Year	Medium
Roberto Feleo	<i>Sleeping Pintado</i>	Philippines	1982	acrylic and lace paper on wood
Roberto Feleo	<i>Narda's Suitors</i>	Philippines	1987	acrylic on molded glue and wood
Roberto Feleo	<i>Manila</i>	Philippines	1985	acrylic on wood and found objects
Roberto Feleo	<i>The Altar of the Dark Side of Spain</i>	Philippines	1985	acrylic and sawdust on wood
Collaboration between Navjot, Rajkumar, Shantibai and Gaslam	<i>Modes of Parallel Practices; Ways of World Making</i>	India	1997	wood, rubber tubes, pigment, cushion
Zhang Peili	<i>Document on Hygiene: No. 3</i>	China	1991	video (36min. 49sec., silent)
Zhang Peili	<i>Undefined Pleasure</i>	China	1996	video installation (30min.)
Thawan Duchanee	<i>Worship</i>	Thailand	1964	oil on canvas
Thawan Duchanee	<i>Self</i>	Thailand	1989	oil, enamel and gold leaf on canvas
Thawan Duchanee	<i>Battle of Mara</i>	Thailand	1989	oil and enamel on canvas
Thawan Duchanee	<i>Future</i>	Thailand	1989	oil, enamel and gold leaf on canvas
Wong Hoy Cheong	<i>Sook Ching (Purge)</i>	Malaysia	1989–90	video (27min.)
Wong Hoy Cheong	<i>Sook Ching (Purge)</i>	Malaysia	1989	oil on gunny sack
Wong Hoy Cheong	<i>Doghole</i>	Malaysia	2009	video (21min. 34sec.)
Tang Da Wu	<i>Botswana Sad Song</i>	Singapore	1989	pencil on paper
Tang Da Wu	<i>Horn Chase</i>	Singapore	1991	pencil on paper
Tang Da Wu	<i>A Cut in Time Saves Life</i>	Singapore	1989	pencil on paper
Tang Da Wu	<i>Reconstructed Horn from Rhino Drink</i>	Singapore	1989	plaster and plastic medicine bottle
Tang Da Wu	<i>They Poached the Rhino, Dug out its Horn and Made this Drink (video documentation of a live performance)</i>	Singapore	1991	video (16min.)
Tang Da Wu	<i>The Rice Growers</i>	Singapore	1988	acrylic and oil on canvas
Fang Lijun	<i>Series 2 No. 3</i>	China	1992	oil on canvas
Fang Lijun	<i>93, #8</i>	China	1993	oil on canvas
Fang Lijun	<i>No. 12</i>	China	1996	woodcut on paper
Yun Suknam	<i>Genealogy</i>	South Korea	1993	acrylic on wood and photocopied paper
Hanh Thi Pham	<i>Self Portrait/Hairy/Pipe</i>	Vietnam / US	1985	gelatine silver print
Hanh Thi Pham	<i>Reframing the Family #1-9</i>	Vietnam / US	1990–91	type-R print
Hanh Thi Pham	<i>Lesbian Precepts</i>	Vietnam / US	1992–94	color photograph, text, Buddha sculpture, etc.
Xu Bing	<i>Book from the Sky</i>	China	1987–91	woodcut on paper
Xu Bing	<i>An Analyzed Reflection of the World: Handscroll Vol. 1</i>	China	1988	woodcut on paper (handscroll)
Xu Bing	<i>Your Surname, Please.</i>	China	1999	CD-ROM, computer, printer and text panel
Heri Dono	<i>Gamelan of Rumour</i>	Indonesia	1993	wood, gamelan, motor, iron, cable, etc.
Heri Dono	<i>Badman</i>	Indonesia	1991	fiberglass, electronic circuit, coin, etc.
Heri Dono	<i>Artist Gets Obsessed</i>	Indonesia	1991	oil and paper on canvas
Heri Dono	<i>Talking of Nothing</i>	Indonesia	1991	oil and paper on canvas
Heri Dono	<i>Chair (video documentation of a live performance)</i>	Indonesia	1994	video (30min.)

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