



Travelling to the Wonderland

A new installation by Xu Bing at the V&A

2 November 2013 – 2 March 2014

Supported by Jing & Kai

From 2 November, celebrated Chinese artist Xu Bing will transform the V&A's John Madejski Garden into an ethereal Arcadia inspired by the classic Chinese fable *Tao Hua Yuan* (The Peach Blossom Spring). The V&A invited Xu Bing to create a major new work to coincide with the Museum's forthcoming exhibition, *Masterpieces of Chinese Painting 700 – 1900* which brings together the finest examples of Chinese painting to present an overview of one of the world's greatest artistic traditions.

Based on the Chinese fable written by the scholar Tao Qian (or Tao Yuanming, 365-427) in 421AD, about people who lead an ideal existence in harmony with nature and each other, unaware of the outside world, Xu Bing's installation is deliberately 'non-real'. '*Tao Hua Yuan is a long lost dream and we don't know if its existence is real or pure fiction.*' (Xu Bing)

This dream-like landscape will be created around the central water feature of the John Madejski Garden, built up from layers of thinly-cut stones collected from five different places in China to represent mountains. Clusters of ceramic houses, each one handmade and coloured to reflect the diverse traditional styles of houses from the different provinces, will be placed among the stones. For example, rocks taken from the Tai Hu Lake in the lower Yangtze River region are accompanied by houses in Suzhou garden style. The same meticulous detailing also applies to the positioning of particular ceramic animals in relation to the type of stone.

Modern elements have also been introduced into the landscape to represent the co-existence of ancient and new in contemporary China and remind the viewer of present, everyday life. Some of the ceramic houses will contain small LCD screens with

cartoon animations, others will contain lights to make them seem inhabited. Lighting and mist will change the atmosphere of the piece depending on the time of day.

Xu Bing said of the installation: “*My goal is to treat every process and element as precisely and meticulously as a traditional Chinese artist works with every brushstroke. Travelling to the Wonderland is one of my most challenging pieces.*”

To complement *Travelling to the Wonderland*, the V&A will present a display of works on paper by Xu Bing in the T.T. Tsui Gallery. This will include one of his large-scale ‘New English Calligraphy’ pieces, based on Tao Qian’s historical writing on *Tao Hua Yuan*, shown for the first time at the V&A. In addition, there will be albums of paintings representing Xu Bing’s vision of *Tao Hua Yuan* and sketches that show the process of creating the garden installation.

Xu Bing (born 1955) has had a distinguished career and has received international recognition for his printmaking skills and installation pieces that question the idea of communicating meaning through language. Xu studied printmaking at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, where he currently serves as Vice President. In 1999 Xu Bing was the recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship in recognition of his ‘capacity to contribute importantly to society, particularly in printmaking and calligraphy’. Other accolades include the Fukuoka Asian Culture Prize in 2003 and the Southern Graphics Council lifetime achievement award in 2006 for the way his ‘use of text, language and books has impacted the dialogue of the print and art world in significant ways.’ In 2010 Xu Bing became an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters, Columbia University.

His solo exhibitions have been held at such prestigious venues as the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Washington and the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York. Xu Bing has also shown at the 45th and 51st Venice Biennales. Recent exhibitions include *Where does the dust itself collect?*, Lower Manhattan Cultural Council, New York (2011); *Background Story 7*, British Museum, London (2011); *Phoenix Project*, Today Art Museum, Beijing (2010); and *Xu Bing: Landscape Landscript*, Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, Oxford (2013).

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Notes to Editors

- A specially commissioned film recorded in Xu Bing's studio in Beijing, whilst preparing the work is available on www.vam.ac.uk/channel
- *Travelling to the Wonderland* by Xu Bing will be on display in the V&A John Madejski Garden, 2 November 2013 – 2 March 2014
- *Travelling to the Wonderland: Sketches, Calligraphy and Paintings* by Xu Bing will be on display in the V&A's T.T. Tsui Gallery, 2 November 2013 – 2 March 2014
- Free admission
- The Museum is open daily 10:00 – 17:45 and until 22:00 every Friday
- *Masterpieces of Chinese Painting 700-1900* is at the V&A 26 October 2013 – 19 January 2014. For more information and bookings visit www.vam.ac.uk/chinesepainting

Travelling to the Wonderland and *Travelling to the Wonderland: Sketches, Calligraphy and Paintings* are created by Xu Bing for the V&A with support from Jing & Kai, who represent Xu Bing's installation works worldwide. They are exclusive partners on this project with Xu Bing and Xu Bing's studio.

For further PRESS information please contact the V&A Press Office on 0207 942 2502 or email press.office@vam.ac.uk

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