

Xie Ke 谢克

Creative Thinking

The way I built my studio is as if I am creating my artworks. Adopting a blend of Oriental and Western elements, I meant to achieve a Zen state of mind and yet fulfill a modern aesthetics look.



Profile

1955 Born in Hong Kong

1978-80 Was a graphic designer and illustrator at Hong Kong Television Broadcast Ltd, Golden Harvest Film and Hong Kong Rudi-fusion Broadcasts Ltd

1980 Graduated from the First Institute of Art and Design, Hong Kong

Went to further studies in the History of Traditional Chinese Art at Beijing's Central Academy of Craft & Design (now known as Tsinghua University, Academy of Fine Arts)

1981-87 Returned to Hong Kong to teach at the First Institute of Art and Design as a senior lecturer and Hong Kong Polytechnic as a visiting lecturer

1987-95 Set up a design studio and publishing house in Hong Kong

1996 Migrated to Singapore

2007 Relocated to China and designed own art studio

Exhibitions

2015

Took part in ARTBeijing 2015

“Young Heart Burning Love” Solo Exhibition by Xie Ke, Enjoy Museum of Art, Beijing

“Beyond Belief” Solo Art Exhibition by Xie Ke, Singapore

2014

International Art Biennale, Qingdao, Shandong, China

2013

“Micro-infiltration” Group Exhibition, Sui Feng Art Centre, Beijing

2012

“The Territory of Xie Ke” Solo Exhibition, Hong Kong Arts Centre

“Dialogue” Contemporary Art Group Exhibition, Langham Place Beijing

2011

Took part in CIGE 2011, Beijing and ARTBeijing 2011

Took part in SH Contemporary 2011

“Sensation of Contemporary Art” Group Exhibition, HaKaren Gallery, Singapore

2010

“Charisma” Solo Exhibition of Xie Ke, Hanmo Art Gallery, Beijing

Exhibited in Fine Art Asia 2010, Hong Kong

2009

Exhibited in ARTSingapore 2009

2008

Took part in ARTSingapore 2008 and ARTBeijing 2008

2004

Participated in Contemporary Chinese Art Group Exhibition, Marseilles Art Museum

1986

Wrote The Art of the Chinese Pagodas, published in Taiwan

1985

Wrote Chinese New Year’s Traditional Block Prints, published in Hong Kong

1980

Hong Kong Society of Illustrators Group Exhibition, Hong Kong Arts Centre

Publications

2015

“Young Heart Burning Love” Art Collection of Xie Ke, published November 2015, Beijing
Harper’s Bazaar Art - March (Front cover + eight pages introducing the artist, his unique works and expert critique highly praising his artistic creations)

1987

The Art of the Chinese Pagodas, published in Taiwan

1985

Chinese New Year's Traditional Block Prints, published in Hong Kong

1980

Hong Kong Society of Illustrators Group Exhibition, Hong Kong Arts Centre

Creative Thinking

Born in Hong Kong, China in 1955, Xie Ke became a graphic designer and illustrator in the late 1970s. Being the first foreign student to study art in China after its liberation, he enrolled into Beijing's Central Academy of Craft & Design in 1980 and graduated with a major in the History of Traditional Chinese Art. During this period, Xie Ke traveled and carried out extensive research across China, to discover the "roots" of Chinese culture and heritage. Subsequently in 1984, he returned to Hong Kong as an art and design lecturer. He first taught at the Chinese Art Faculty of First Institute of Art & Design and then Hong Kong Polytechnic University. In recent years, he has moved back to China to further his artistic career. He has also published two books between 1985 and 1987, China's Traditional Lunar New Year's Woodblock Prints and The Art of Chinese Pagodas. As part of his cultural journey of discovery during the past thirty years, he has continued to travel between Hong Kong, Taiwan and the Mainland.

Xie Ke's background as a designer, together with his rich experiences in life have continued to contribute towards his evolution and development as a unique artist. His approach towards creating sculptures and paintings is direct and crisp, transmitting positive messages to the viewers. Theme provoking thoughts of how youths surrounded by a technology advanced society, mingled with traditional values have conflicting choices to make. Blindfolded heroes, like Themis the Greek Goddess of Justice, impervious to injustice, returning balance and order. Xie Ke emphasizes the importance of education to the young, believing knowledge is the way to change society for the better. He portrays and records fragments of 5,000 years of history in a humorous yet thought provoking way, combined with his own critique and reflection of the world today.

The Charisma of Xie Ke

Hailing from Hong Kong, Xie Ke used to live in Singapore for over a decade there before relocating to China. Previously being a graphic designer, Xie Ke is adept at exploring the contexts of decorative art and sculptural techniques. He has a strong sense of workmanship and a trove of life experiences; he also has a habit of reflecting on culture.

When Xie Ke was furthering his studies in China, he took the opportunity to visit various provinces observing the many different forms of folk art. He contained the cultural

conscience, responsibility and empathy of a modern intellectual, going to places where others may have not been and saw things that the rest did not notice – all in order to know more about the remaining spectacular and unusual local architecture and Chinese decorative art. Therefore, through his journey, he has grasped the unfathomable spirit of Chinese art.

Xie Ke not only travels regularly between the Mainland, Hong Kong and Taiwan, but also to Singapore and the rest of Southeast Asia. Every time when he was at the old Kai Tak Airport, watching the skyscrapers over the horizon, he would reflect on this term - internationalization.

Its history and geographic location have enabled Hong Kong to be intercultural on a macro level. The cross-straits politics, economic conflicts or changing situations always have an impact on Hong Kong, making its people edgy. Therefore, the cultural reality that Xie Ke experienced at that time equipped him with an extraordinary potential.

Xie Ke criticizes beyond himself and he speaks his own language by placing numerous artistic elements (Western versus Oriental, tradition versus modern) into his works. Hence, the charisma of Xie Ke comes from striding across different societal systems and cultural ways.

The paintings and sculptures of Xie Ke possess the grace of a graphic designer or architect. The simplicity and conciseness of his paintings presents multi-layers of implied meanings and symbolism, and he is good at depicting the whole picture with traditional context and being meticulous. Every little detail in his paintings, be it the many artistic forms, execution of techniques etc, reveals of the deliberate thought placed into his creative process. Xie Ke highlights a special characteristic of illustration in his works, overriding the traditional academic way of thinking.

In contemporary art, Xie Ke understands that the dedication of creating his artworks is not just honing his craft, but instead to raise people's spirits. His artworks are full of meaning and his purpose is to remind viewers to focus on the concept behind every painting and sculpture. His charisma is expressed through visual means to raise awareness of being critical and culturally reflective, which is an artist's way of pursuing a modern way of life; constantly striving towards a new contemporary spirit that is rich in its meaning.

Gu Zhenqing
Independent curator

Traversing between History and Reality

Passion is important for an artist and it can be manifested in many ways – as a driving force for creativity, a state of existence or as the core of the spirit.

And this is how I know of Xie Ke – as a straightforward person, a real doer who does whatever he thinks of doing. In the 1970s, Hong Kong was imbued with vitality and developing at a rapid pace; Xie Ke was amongst the ‘artistic youth’ and he joined the film and television industries – firstly at Hong Kong Television Broadcast Ltd, Hong Kong Rudi-fusion Broadcasts Ltd and then Golden Harvest Film. His works at that time mainly involved design elements and they already revealed his strong interest in contemporary art. He consciously incorporated many elements of Western contemporary art trends especially surrealism and super-realism. Many of his pieces looked avant-garde; hence Xie Ke was easily categorized by critics then as one who creates with a Western style.

Hailing from a multi-cultural society of Hong Kong, Xie Ke has felt the beckoning of the Chinese culture. This was why he sought a non-Western alternative pathway throughout the whole 1980s. And in 1980, he joined the wave of students venturing overseas, however his destination was not to the West but to Beijing. This point itself is refreshing and different back then.

At one end, he was studying the history of Traditional Chinese Art at Beijing Central Academy of Craft & Design and on the other, he was learning about China in a hands-on manner through traveling extensively across the country. When he first returned to Hong Kong, he became a popular educator teaching at the First Institute of Art & Design and Hong Kong Polytechnic University, incorporating into his curriculum a refreshing combination of Western innovativeness and a new way of thinking, with traditional Chinese design content.

In 2004, Xie Ke took part in a contemporary Chinese art exhibition at Marseilles Art Museum. This exhibition played an important significance in promoting contemporary Chinese art to France. His *Gene Series* painting presented certain characteristics of himself. They included his attitude on Western and Oriental cultures, his search for creativity in his works and even a metaphor of documenting history. It is rich in pop art culture; however he balanced it with a sense of aesthetics, making this painting to appear gentler and more expressive than compared to the rest of the participants.

Many concepts of his artworks originated from his sketches done in the 1970s and were enriched by his life experiences acquired from the past three decades. The crux is analyzing culture historically and in reality, in which he wants to capture both the conflict and unification. To a person born in the 1950s, he or she will recognize the strong historical references as many of the images originated in the past. These images may have an obvious political content back then, but with the passing of time, they merely serve now as either a historic symbol or as a personal journal entry.

Xie Ke is naturally not a person who dwells in the past. In his works, the images of the past often appear alongside those with a modern context and this is how he wants to convey his concept - culture is still complex and varied in today's ever-changing society. He is also passing on a message that we can choose to continue seeking new ways of thinking when faced with changes; however we may become victims to the various emerging trends. He wants to be the one who can forsake pursuing trends and be steadfast of the choice he has made since the 1970s.

Xie Ke's artistic journey is limitless and his passion for meaningful perfection continues to drive him on in all that he creates. From this recent series, there are paintings and sculptures – paintings are his love while the process of making a sculpture is his new platform of expressing his passion for art. Irregardless of creating a painting or sculpture, he has included his understanding and experience in design during its process. His paintings contain a strong sense of visual identity while his sculptures focus on telling of a whole story

Dr. Zhao Li
Associate Professor, School of Humanities
Central Academy of Fine Arts

Beyond Belief

Sometimes in life you are privileged to meet someone who even before you shake their hand, who through their natural aura can give you the sense of their upright and steadfast personality; this was the case with Xie Ke. Since that unique introduction and getting to know each other through our sharing and the inexhaustible enthusiasm that we feel when surrounded by his works of sculpture art, I have come to consider him as a very honourable artist and a friend.

The creative journey and creations of a real artist, should truthfully reflect their inner personality, experiences in life and the passions that drive them to express who they are and what they believe; in this respect, Xie Ke is an artist in the purest sense.

His background as a designer, together with his rich life experiences have continued to contribute towards his evolution and development as a unique artist. Xie Ke's captivating works emphasize the importance of educating the young, as he believes knowledge is the way to change society for the better. He uniquely portrays fragments of history in a humorous yet thought provoking way, combining them with his own critique and reflection of the world today. Bright shining heroes from Chinese martial arts stories and the golden age of Kungfu films, blindfolded like Themis the Greek Goddess of Justice, defending those in need, returning balance and order.

Through his dedication and refreshing combination of Western innovativeness and a distinctive way of rethinking traditional Chinese design, his works elevate the spirit, raising an awareness in the viewer that is culturally reflective. With his sculptures possessing the grace and balance of a graphic designer or architect, having a positive energy that resonates visually, reflecting the spirit of their creator.

Xie Ke does not let various emerging trends influence his thinking, though on the other hand he does not dwell in the past, often combining the “then and now” the “old and modern” to contrast an ever changing society, with often conflicting values or ideals.

Xie Ke’s artistic journey and quest for perfection continues to inspire and motivate him in all that he creates. In a world where depth of meaning and quality are too often sacrificed by commercialism and the lure of making a quick profit, like a beacon in the dark, Xie Ke stands out, setting an exemplary standard for others to aspire towards.

As an artist that has positively helped others without expecting anything in return except their happiness during their artistic journey and who has touched the lives of onlookers with his captivating works of inspirational sculptural art, I would like to take this opportunity to wish Xie Ke a life that continues to achieve all that he set out to accomplish.

Robert Mason
Art Director
Beijing Central Art Gallery