

Thank you, the Chancellor and Vice Chancellor.

Dear Chancellor Professor Peter Shergold, and Vice Chancellor Professor Barney Glover, and distinguished guests and members of Western Sydney University,

I can't thank you enough for this great honour that the Western Sydney University and its Board of Trustees have given me. It will take me a while to get used to being Dr Guan Wei.

My first visual contact of Australia occurred in 1978 when the National Art Museum of China in Beijing held an exhibition of Australian Landscape paintings. What impressed me the most was the cover of the catalogue which was a painting of a huge red ant hill by Sidney Nolan. The exhibition showed me the extraordinary landscape of Australia. It had an ancient and unique looking. Then in the early 1980s, during the Australian film week, I watched the first Australian film called *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, showing a group of beautiful schoolgirls who disappeared after having a picnic on the hanging rock. The film was visually stunning, the story was a mystery but also haunting. I've never forgotten that film.

Who would know that in 2006 I went to the Arnhem Land to live with the Indigenous community and created a series of paintings called *The Mysterious Land*, in which I had painted those ant hills that I saw in Sidney Nolan's painting.

But for that to happen, I was very lucky to have a real contact of the Australians who had played a key role in my coming and thriving in Australia. In the mid-1980s, I met Professor Nicholas Jose who was at the time the Australian Cultural Counsellor at the Beijing Embassy. He held a private exhibition showing the artworks by me and a few other artists at his home in Beijing. The late Professor Geoff Parr who was the Director of the Tasmanian School of Art saw the exhibition during his visit in Beijing. Professor Parr said I was a great contemporary artist, "one in a billion" and he invited me to come to Tasmanian School of Art on a residency in 1989 for three months. In 1990 at Professor Parr's

invitation, I came again to Tasmanian School of Art. A year later I went on to be an artist in residency at Museum of Contemporary Art, then at Australian National University.

While I was in Sydney, an artist friend and I decided to go for gallery hunting, randomly knocking on the doors we could find and trying to introduce ourselves and our works with our limited English. There was no luck, but on the third day, one of the doors was opened by Dr Gene Sherman, who welcomed us and spotted my talent. Later she held my first solo exhibition at Sherman Galleries called *Test Tube Baby*. My 15 years of collaborating with Dr Sherman saw a series of great successes in my career.

One of many great things Professor Nicholas Jose has done for my career was to bring under the diplomatic exemption my 48 paintings called *Two-Finger Exercises* out of China to Australia in 1991. I was so thrilled when the whole series was collected by MCA, and I couldn't believe the pot of money I got from the collection. Years later, I realised I should have asked for a higher price.

So far I have had over 70 solo exhibitions in Australia and around the world. In 1999, I became the first artist from China who had a solo exhibition at MCA which I believe established my leading position in the Australian contemporary art scene. In the following years I represented Australia in biennales and other international shows. The description of who I was changed from "Chinese artist", to "Chinese Australian artist", or "Australian Chinese artist", to "Australian artist".

Personally, my most ambitious exhibition was *Other Histories: Guan Wei's Fable for a Contemporary World*, held at the Powerhouse Museum in 2006, curated by Dr Claire Roberts. The show brought to the public an imaginary history, based on the story of Zheng He's voyages.

In 2008 I set up a studio in Beijing. Commuting between China and Australia, I helped many art exchange programs between the two countries and also involved in bilateral cultural activities organised by the Australian Embassy while Dr Geoff Raby was the ambassador there.

I have always had a close connection with South-West and Western Sydney. In 2019 I was greatly honoured by MCA's Guan Wei Collection show. But many people didn't know that the work Feng Shui was actually created at the studio lent to me at Casula Powerhouse. I was also grateful to Campbelltown Art Centre which generously let me use its space to create many other big works. My connection with Western Sydney University went back to 1992 when a famous group exhibition called Six Contemporary Chinese Artists was held at Space YZ, University of Western Sydney. I was one of the six Chinese artists. Since 2019, I have been on the Advisory Board of the Institute for Australian and Chinese Arts and Culture at Western Sydney University. I am now curating a special exhibition of emerging artists with the Institute and Bankstown Arts Centre. I hope my success as an artist will inspire and encourage more young people of culturally diverse backgrounds in their artistic journeys.

Lastly, being the first Chinese Australian artist to receive this honorary doctor in creative arts, I feel greatly honoured. And I feel proud to be a member of the Chinese community. I would like to thank again Western Sydney University for its consistent support to arts and cultural exchanges. Thank you again, Chancellor and Vice Chancellor. I would also like to thank Dr Geoff Raby, the Chair of Advisory Board of the Institute for Australian and Chinese Arts and Culture, Professor Jing Han, the Institute's director, and all other distinguished guests and friends. I must also thank my family, my wife Liu Pin and my daughter Mimi for their unwavering support and love all these years.

Thank you.