

Contact Information

+61 2 9685 9944

ACIAC@westernsydney.edu.au

Australia-China Institute for Arts and Culture

Ground Floor, Building EA, Parramatta South Campus

Western Sydney University

Locked Bag 1979

Penrith NSW 2751 Australia



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**WESTERN SYDNEY
UNIVERSITY**



Australia-China Institute
for Arts and Culture



ADAM CHANG'S PANDAS AND TREASURES

Venue

Ground Floor, Building EA
Australia-China Institute for Arts and Culture Gallery
Parramatta South Campus
Western Sydney University

Exhibition Period

13 May — 12 July 2019

Gallery Opening Hours

Mon — Thurs 10.00am — 3.00 pm

Friday 11.00am — 3.00 pm

For more information, please visit

https://www.westernsydney.edu.au/ACIAC/exhibitions2/adam_changs_pandas_and_treasures

BE A CULTURAL NAVIGATOR

This Master program is offered by the Australia-China Institute for Arts and Culture, in collaboration with the School of Humanities and Communication Arts. A challenging degree program which is designed to meet the needs of cultural institutions and government departments increasingly engaged in cultural exchanges between Australia and China.

The course will help you develop an understanding of Australian and Chinese cultures and their cultural policies, intercultural communication, international business management, and cultural diplomacy.

This degree program requires 18 months full-time study. Individual units may be taken separately and students in full-time employment can spread their studies over successive years. Australian students may engage critically with local culture through one unit of study in China. Students who only complete part of the course can obtain a certificate or diploma. The first year of this program is focused on coursework, and the second year on a major research project. The purpose of the project is to encourage students to apply the knowledge

and skills from previous units to a real-life setting which may involve a work placement in Australia. For both domestic and international students, this Masters program also provides a pathway to higher degree research study.

The Australia-China Institute for Arts and Culture will offer scholarships to Master of Chinese Cultural Relations (MCCR) students. The scholarships will provide a cost of living stipend and cover all or partial tuition fees. Equal numbers of these scholarships are available to domestic and international applicants. Applications will be considered based on previous academic achievement and relevant work experience.

For more information, please visit
www.westernsydney.edu.au/ACIAC





MASTER OF CHINESE CULTURAL RELATIONS

Harmony: Adam Chang's 'Life and Universe'

From 'human beings' to 'Shan Shui with Panda', the theme of Adam Chang's paintings has shifted from the 'national treasure' level cultural celebrity portraits to the grand environmentalist natural kingdom series. Many claimed to have been stunned by the 'sudden change' of identity that is happening to a 'portrait artist'. In fact, this feeling of shock could only have resulted from a misreading of him - although Chang has been internationally acclaimed for his impressive achievements in the art of portraiture, this represented only the tip of the iceberg in the bulk of his artistic attainment. The recent launch of his *Shan Shui with Panda* series should be useful in drawing the attention of the international art world to the breadth of Chang's artistic thinking and his aesthetic magnitude.

Adam Chang is often referred to as 'a quiet artist'. This is because he, like a 'hermit', rarely has any contact with the world outside his studio. This seems to bear a connection with the spiritual 'inertia' of the asceticist practice of a senior generation of artists such as Zhao Wuji and Zhu Dequn. The difference is that Chang does not directly draw from the theory of 'yijing' (artistic conception) in traditional Chinese painting; instead, he follows the Taoist view of 'Nature and Man in One'. Following the core concept of 'harmony', he is now moving his reflections from about 'human beings' to the ultimate realm of harmony between 'Man and Nature'.

From the 2007 Australian national Archibald Prize finalist Brian, *the Dog and the Doorway* to the 2011 People's Choice Winner John Coetzee, from the shocking surrealist portrait *Salvador Dali* (2017) to today's high-profile 'symbol of China' combination *Shan Shui with Panda*, the new exhibition 'Adam Chang's Pandas and Treasures' very well 'captures' some of most representative works of his 'transitional period'.

The national Archibald Prize requires that 'portrait subjects' need to be cultural celebrities, but Chang has deliberately chosen to work on two 'immigrants' - Brian Sherman and John Coetzee are both migrants from South Africa. This choice probably reflects the artist's own immigrant background, but it simultaneously conveys his appreciation of the beauty of the Australian concept of multiculturalist society. From the cultural perspective of 'national treasure' as a symbol, if Brian Sherman's identity as a philanthropist, John Coetzee's identity as a poet and novelist and Salvador Dali's identity as a master of artistic creativity display three dimensions of human civilization - 'compassion', 'poetry' and 'mimesis', the *Shan Shui with Panda* series offers an 'ultimate' illustration of the philosophical altitude and the universal value of Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi's ideal - let all 'Human Mankind Sharing a Common Destiny' understand 'Nature and Man in One'.

In Chang's inner world, the 'panda' probably stands as an embodiment of the contribution made by the Chinese civilization to the world. However, the 'Shan Shui' here is not only 'Chinese landscape', but rather a general 'image' that communicates a globalized 'Shan Shui', or 'the grand Shan Shui' of the entire universe. If such an artistic vision psychologically and naturally 'fits' the upcoming international art trend in the third decade of the 21st century, one might say that, in a way, Chang has helped to 'pioneer' for world art through the use of 'oriental aesthetics' a 'harmonious' way out of a long-term western predominance in international artistic thinking.

Dr Sheng Tong

Editor-in-Chief, *Contemporary International Chinese Poetry*

Research fellow, International Diaspora Literature and Art Research Association

January 2019

Adam Chang

Adam Chang, born in Shanghai in 1960, was deeply inspired by traditional Chinese calligraphy and art in his childhood. And when he was in the middle school, he started to practice live drawing. He did it for five years. During this time, he started to access Western art and the work of the impressionist master Vincent van Gogh became an indelible influence.

Thanks to the reform policies, Chang became one of the first Chinese artists in the mid-1980s to hold a solo exhibition in China, and soon afterwards, his artworks started to appear in all the important exhibitions in the country.

In 1987, three of his works were chosen for an exhibition in the First Shanghai International Arts Festival, where they were displayed side by side with the masterpieces by other Chinese master artists such as Liu Haisu and Yan Wenliang. This event granted him his earlier reputation in the art circles of Shanghai as one of the most prominent artists across China.

In 1989, Chang participated in the Seventh National Fine Arts Exhibition of China. He was the youngest member of Shanghai Art Association to present works at the most important event for the country's artistic community.

From 1989 to 1992, Chang pursued his study at the Shanghai Academy of Fine Arts, Shanghai University.

In 1992, his painting "Li Dazhao" was awarded the Grand Prize of Shanghai for Artistic Creation.

In 1997, Chang moved to Sydney to start his artistic career in Australia.

In 1998 and 2000, Chang's works were twice nominated as a finalist in Doug Moran National Portrait Prize and they ultimately won the Third Best Work and Most Popular Work Prizes (voted by the public).

In 2001, Chang was selected as one of the 24 Most Outstanding Artists in Australia. His works were printed on the cover of the exhibition catalogue and collected by Australia's state-owned art museums.

From 2005 to 2012, Chang's works were nominated six times as a finalist in the Archibald Prize of the Art Gallery of NSW. He made it to the final list of candidate winners in 2009 and he won the People's Choice award in 2011. These accomplishments turned him into an important part of the contemporary art history of Australia.

In 2006, Chang was awarded the title of "Official Artist" by Australian Council of the Arts.

In 2012, Chang participated in the Redlands Westpac nominated exhibition, a contemporary art exhibition co-hosted by Australia and New Zealand. His works "Charles Teo" was collected by the National Portrait Gallery of Australia. From this year on, Chang began to participate in major international art exhibitions.

In 2014 when Chinese President Xi Jinping paid a state visit to Australia, Chang was invited as an outstanding Chinese artist to attend the high-level meeting on cultural exchanges, along with the Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott and members of the Parliament of Australia.

In 2015, Chang's works were exhibited at the Tenth Florence Biennale in Italy and the Contemporary Art Biennale at Medina Cathedral in Malta.

In 2017, Chang's works were exhibited on King Street near Buckingham Palace in central London, UK.

Chang remains the only Australian Chinese artist that has signed agent deals with both European and Australian galleries.

About ACIAC

The Australia-China Institute for Arts and Culture (ACIAC) at Western Sydney University was founded for the purpose of facilitating collaboration and engagement between Australia and China in a culturally smart way.

ACIAC positions itself as a hub and national resource centre for cultural exchange between Australia and the entire Sinosphere, and for cross-cultural collaborative research in the arts and other cultural fields.

ACIAC promotes exchanges between Western Sydney University and its partner universities overseas in mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore. Each year, it engages with the local community in Western Sydney and particularly with ethnic Chinese groups, businesses and individuals and launches significant new research programs of relevance to the Australia-China relationship.

Building on the research strengths of Western Sydney University and on existing exchange programs in the University, ACIAC will stay committed to the enhancement of bilateral understanding between members of Australian and Chinese cultures and to the development of deeper ties through an open, intellectual and dynamic engagement.

For more information, please visit westernsydney.edu.au/aciac/about







Shan Shui with Panda (02) 2019

Brian, the dog and the doorway

Oil on canvas

210 x 137cm

2006

Collection of The Gene & Brian Sherman Collection, Sydney

The Shermans are both leading cultural figures in Australia, and they are devoted to public services and philanthropy. In 2004, through his younger brother David, Adam Chang came to know and meet Dr Gene Sherman, and after that they became friends. Adam once lived in the city of Shanghai, which in modern history had a close connection with the Jewish people and Jewish culture. This brought the Sherman family and Adam closer in their emotional bond.

The well-known Archibald Prize does not just generate each time one of the most important exhibitions that represent the art of Australian painting at its best. It requires that all entry portraits must be 'preferentially of some man or woman distinguished in art, letters, science or politics in contemporary Australia'. For this reason, Adam chose to paint a series for the Sherman family members and he did four portraits in a row. All four of them were later selected for the Prize. Among them, *Spirit of an Ancient Culture* (2009) became a finalist. And *Emile Sherman*, which features the winner of the Oscar Best Producer Award, won the 'People's Choice' Award in 2012.

Brian, the dog and the doorway was another portrait out of the Sherman Family series that had become a finalist for the Archibald Prize of 2007. In this portrait, he broke away from the simple portrait structure, and depicted a closeness that existed between a human being and his animal (dog). From this perspective, the presence of a door or a window takes on a more profound meaning. A window represents a choice, and a door a new beginning. The artist introduced these into his portrait because he wanted to portray the philanthropist and benefactor as a philosopher about the possibilities of his life and universal humanity.

This work did not win the Archibald Prize, but it has won substantial recognition from the Australian art circle for its uniqueness. At one of its Board dinners, NSW Art Gallery invited Adam Chang to be with some of Australia's political and business leaders and cultural elites and discuss this 'special' portrait



Shan Shui with Panda (Series)

Shan Shui with Panda has in recent years been a theme to which Adam Chang remains committed. For a long time he was known to the art world for works that bear elements of Chinese culture. Examples include *TerraCotta Warriors*, *Chinese Zodiac* and *Tibetan Girl*. In a way, the *Shan Shui with Panda* series still draws your attention to Chinese culture, but it distinguishes itself from all earlier works by taking his artistic creation to a new level.

Shan Shui with Panda was first seen in the UK gallery exhibitions of Tanya Baxter Contemporary. That was followed by the exhibitions of Mosman Art Prize 2018 and Nanda\Hobbs Contemporary, Australia. This series has since been widely regarded as the best ensemble of artistic metaphors that are being used to present China to the world.

This series presents two significant symbols in Chinese culture through the use of striking colours and techniques. Blending Chinese and Western cultures, the works in the series employ the oil-painting skills of Western Art to communicate the essence of Chinese 'artistic shan shui'. Through a wildly 'blurred' treatment, these works transcend the cultural boundaries of traditional Chinese 'shan shui' and flaunt the unique characteristics of contemporary art in the age of globalization. In the meantime, when these combine with the highly symbolic image of the uniquely Chinese panda, they open up an enormous space of meaning-making in which all lives coexist in harmony.

After 40 years of artistic practice, Adam now 'embraces the juxtaposed dual traditions' of Chinese traditional water and ink painting and western oil painting. Working by the idea of revitalising the classics, Adam is now presenting *Shan Shui with Panda* to the world. The series is a massive undertaking and the artworks in it will be exhibited from 2017 to the opening ceremony of the Beijing Winter Olympics in 2022. Each art piece depicts a unique panda figure, and each panda against different 'shan shui'. The philosophy that it communicates coincides with the grand idea of Master Zhuang Zi that was elaborated in his classic Fable: 'All beings are seeds of one another, yielding back and forth their different forms, beginning and ending like a circle, so that no fixed groupings apply.'



John Coetzee

Oil on canvas

240 x 310cm

2010

Acclaimed novelist and academic J M Coetzee migrated from South Africa to Australia in 2002 and became an Australian citizen in 2006. Currently an Honorary Visiting Research Fellow in the English department at the University of Adelaide, Coetzee was awarded the 2003 Nobel Prize in Literature and has the rare distinction of winning the Man Booker Prize twice, in 1983 for *Life & Times of Michael K* and in 1999 for *Disgrace*.

Coetzee and Adam Chang are both supporters of Voiceless, the independent non-profit organisation dedicated to alleviating the suffering of animals in Australia. They hold similar values concerning the protection of animals and are also united by their spirit of compassion and kindness towards their fellow human beings.

While Coetzee is a very private person, Chang was fortunate to enjoy an afternoon with him in Adelaide and found that his eyes reveal a deep serenity and an insight into the human condition, qualities the artist has attempted to capture in this portrait. In contrast, the strong red brush strokes act as a powerful symbol of both artist and subject's sensitivity to, and experience of, the violence and discrimination that exist in our world.

The central hall of the New South Wales Art Gallery. This large portrait hangs in the centre, the sacred, most important place. At 11am on 16 June, 2011, the New South Wales Art Gallery announces the winner of 'the People's Choice for the Archibald Prize'. It is reported that of a total of 22,593 visitor votes, Adam Chang is far ahead of the one in second place. This work later toured Australia and gained two 'People's Choice' awards, at the Tarrawarra Museum of Art in Victoria and the Tweed River Art Gallery in New South Wales respectively. In the space of three months Chang obtained three significant awards, all People's Choice. This was a great unprecedented honour.

This work is now a part of the Australian art history and it has been included in the major catalogue *Let's face it – The history of the Archibald Prize* which is published by the Art Gallery of NSW.





Salvador Dali

Oil on linen

140 x 160cm

2017

Collection of Li Xiao Contemporary Art

Completed in 2017, *Dali* is another typical portrait by Adam Chang. Prior to this, Adam had gained a world-wide reputation thanks to a series of visually shocking works in portraiture. In 2015, his works were invited to participate in the Florence Biennale and there they became the centerpieces in the Organizing Committee's promotional video.

Dali presents Salvador Dali with a handlebar mustache, a typical Dali style known to many people. The portrait captures a moment in the movements of this world famous master's eyes and uses it to communicate the full dynamics and vitality of his entire body and, more importantly, offer a glimpse into the profound depths of Dali's mental consciousness.

Dali is known to the world for his surrealist artworks. He is an artist with incredible talent and a unique imagination. Working under the influence of then popular Freudian theory about the interpretation of dreams, Dali frequently brought his incredible painting techniques to bear on grotesque images from bizarre dreams, creating extremely artworks that bear his unique style.

Dali's painting skills bear signs of the influence of Italian Renaissance masters. In an era that has been completely taken over by photographic images, he still stressed the importance of easel paintings.

Adam, like Dali, fully believes in the importance of protecting easel painting, and he uses this portrait to convey his tribute to and respect for the master. However, Adam is not at all conservative. In many ways, he is an eclectic artist who never stops exploring new possibilities. He is a great admirer of American artist Andy Warhol. That explains why he had *Andy Warhol* as one of the portraits in his world artists series.



