

Xu Bing



Xu Bing, *Forest Project: The Blue and Green Wonderland*, 2014, Nepalese paper, 98cm x 744cm.

This long hand scroll begins on its right-hand end with a cluster of trees on a cliff. One larger, predominate tree has branches that extend directly sideways with leaves painted with dabs of green and blue. Moving leftward along the scroll across a bridge of blank negative space, there is a large cluster of trees with leaves of varying textures (some form dense rounded heads, others are feathery). Moving further left, trees recede into the background toward the upper area of the scroll. After another bridge of black space, a stretch of trees extends from the left-hand boundary of the scroll. This third patch of trees is painted with a wash of green leaves and branches both skinny and thick, short and long, straight and curled. Across the top of the scroll, a hybrid calligraphy of has English letters stacked like the brushstrokes of Chinese characters so that the letters form a unit of a word. The text reads: A haze day and an orange alert in Beijing, being trapped at home and seeing Forest Project children's drawings, attempting to compose them into a blue-green landscape. Ancient Chinese painters created blue-green landscapes and they are extraordinary. Xu Bing, Two Thousand and Fourteen in Beijing.

Being one of the most prominent Chinese artists on the global stage, Xu Bing is known for his attempts to deconstruct traditional art forms for new creations to explore the issues of common meaning. Extending the dimensions of contemporary Chinese art but centering on the values which human beings share, his works built up a new self-contained artistic system which is also friendly to everyone. These works break down

geographical barriers, get over economic discrepancies, and neglect cultural differences, inviting people with various backgrounds to the same platform for reflection.

Forest Project is a social program which creates a self-sustaining system that moves funds from developed places to Kenya for replanting the forests. Xu teaches children in Kenya to draw trees and then sells their drawings on the internet. Therefore, painted trees on paper by the Kenyan children will be transformed into real trees planted on the fields of Kenya. This, like every project of his, is an outcome of creative transformations on materials and ideas. It is an experiment that involves art, education, and capital to knit an automatic network linking industrial human society with the natural environment. Taking advantage of the free internet, Xu connects different spheres together and lets the resources flow between areas. He has been developing an artistic narrative to express his awareness of the most fundamental understanding on the notion of common property, which has been undermined for a long time by the splits of history, geography, economy, and culture. This social consciousness, together with the profound visual texture of the works, forms Xu's unusual but inclusive art aesthetics.

—Jialu Guo

b. 1955, Chongqing, China
MacArthur Fellow, 1999

Exhibitions