



Wenjun Xie

After graduating from MA in Contemporary Curating Studies at Winchester School of Art, University of Southampton, I worked as a Curatorial Assistant at John Hansard Gallery for nearly two years. My main focus was on the international commission project *Portraits In a Chinese Studio* (PIACS) by artist Grace Lau, as part of the public art programme Co-Creating Public Space. This, as my first curating project, holds a special significance in my curatorial career. It bridged the gap between my academic knowledge and practical experience, linking my international background with the diverse UK art scene.

This enlightening journey illuminated the multifaceted responsibilities of a curator. I've come to understand the intricate factors that contribute to the success of an exhibition and the diverse curating methods involved. The work of curating extends far beyond the confines of physical gallery space; it

involves links to artists, institutions, communities, and audiences, co-creating a meaningful work.

This experience underscored the importance of multitasking and time management for curators. I supported various aspects of the project, including press releases and social media promotions, artwork transportation and logistics, and creating public art archives. Additionally, I worked both inside and outside the gallery, collaborating closely with artists and communities. I supported this project while it travelled to four cities: Southampton, London, Eastbourne and St. Leonards-on-Sea, to plan exhibitions for both standard white cube and non-traditional art spaces. In addition to this, with the joint efforts of my colleagues, I hosted two exhibitions, three workshops and an Artist Talk for this project, engaging more than 3,400 participants.

These responsibilities provided me with extensive practical experience; however, the identity issue has often bothered me. Being able to work on a project relevant to my cultural background has given me a great entry point into the UK art industry, but I still find it hard to understand a balance between breaking stereotypes and constructing a true image of China. I hope to find a better way to solve this in future curatorial paths.

I am very appreciative that I have had the opportunity to work at John Hansard Gallery working on the project *PIACS*, that has deepened my understanding of the power of art to challenge norms and narratives. Its openness has empowered my initiative and helped me to continue honing my practice. This first step in my professional career has filled me with enthusiasm and a commitment to the ever-evolving world of curatorial practice.