



Yutong Zhang

Inspired by Hans Ulrich Obrist's *the kitchen show* (1991), I was driven by curiosity to pursue my studies in Winchester School of Art, University of Southampton in 2021. In an increasingly globalised and homogenised world, I aim to use curatorial practice to promote cultural diversity and propose a different form of global dialogue, specifically for Chinese culture.

In 2022, I began my summer internship at John Hansard Gallery, where I supported the research and development of their exhibitions and artistic programme. Specifically, I assisted in the creation of educational handouts for *Anne Tallentire: Material Distance* (2022), helping audiences better understand the show. Additionally, I led a talk discussing artist Jitish Kallat's work, *Covering Letter* (2022), and supported a Touch Tour designed for visually impaired visitors. This experience provided me with a valuable opportunity to embrace diversity and inclusive culture, and I witnessed the Gallery's commitment to addressing broad social issues with openness and enthusiasm for all.

After graduation, I was appointed as a Curatorial Assistant for Co-Creating Public Space. This project is a nationally significant public art programme funded by Arts Council England. Specifically, I supported Grace Lau's *Portraits In a Chinese Studio*. This project reverses the colonial lens and 'exotic subjects' of 19th-century and early 20th-century Western photographers in China.

As a member of the curatorial team, I worked with another MACC graduate and senior colleagues. We conducted extensive research on Grace's work, recreating a Chinese portraits studio in a public shopping centre to coincide with Chinese New Year 2023, inviting local residents to have their portraits taken in the studio. I supported the artist, photographer, participants, audiences, community and gallery partners, oversaw the day-to-day management, supported and evaluated 1,478 portraits being taken over 17 days, receiving both positive public feedback and critical acclaim.

Due to the success of *Portraits In a Chinese Studio* in Southampton, I was invited to curate an exhibition of the portraits from Southampton in John Hansard Gallery in Autumn 2023. This exhibition selected highlights from the Southampton iteration of the project, combining Lau's early research and publications. In curating the show, I worked with my colleague to choose exhibits, design layouts and handouts. However, selecting 10 portraits from over 600 diverse images was challenging. I adhered to the principle of the human cycle, showcasing racial diversity to represent a certain urban characteristic of Southampton, received 5,269 visitors.

Grace's Portraits In a Chinese Studio subsequently toured to London at the Centre for British Photography, from October–December 2023, running alongside both Frieze London and Paris Photo; Eastbourne during Chinese New Year 2024, alongside the Turner Prize 2023 and as part of Eastbourne Alive and St. Leonards-on-Sea in East Sussex during May–June 2024. An additional exhibition as part of Photo Hastings in October 2024 will see the culmination of the project.

During the project's time, I developed the proposals and ideas for the tour; created accessible interpretive materials; supported marketing team to run *Co-Creating Public Space* social media, receiving 34,821 online visitors from Instagram. I also initiated RED, receiving 18,912 visitors within a year, facilitating collaboration between local Chinese artists and the gallery; and assisted in organising workshops, talks and events, as well as being a guest lecturer to share my experience of *What is the role of curator* to MA curation students on 30 October 2023.

This experience allowed me to challenge the limitations of gallery and non-

gallery spaces. Through practice, I deeply understood that the touring shows are not monotonous journeys from A to B to C. Instead, they engaged in dialogue with the local communities and residents, creating unique and enduring memories. People truly participated in this global dialogue, bringing the uniqueness of their ethnicities and contributing to this two-year and continuously evolving public art project.

Additionally, reflecting on my curatorial practice, I have realised that it is centered around making informed choices and decisions. From one idea to the next, I created spaces for the artist that sparked societal attention and discussion about Chinese culture, whether in dispersed Chinese communities, or in seaside towns with few Chinese residents. I invited participants to explore the “metaphors” within, with varying degrees of depth, ensuring that lasting good art is passed down to the next generation, continually addressing the impacts of aging in contemporary society.

Working alongside veterans in the creative industry, I have gradually come to understand the practical significance of art curating within the broader cultural and social context. By observing the production of various exhibitions at John Hansard Gallery, such as *Pia Arke: Silences and Stories*, tracing touring archives like *Derek Jarman's Modern Nature*, and actively participating in the Co-Creating Public Space, I have developed my observational, sensitivity, and critical skills as a curator. This experience has enhanced my confidence for future career development.