

Qiu Zhijie 邱志傑

The Unicorn and the Dragon

A map of the collections
of Fondazione Querini Stampalia,
Venice and Aurora Museum, Shanghai

curated by Chiara Bertola
and Davide Quadrio

Venice, Fondazione Querini Stampalia
May 29 / August 18 2013



1. Map of the Busy Gods

ink dub rubbing on paper, 720 x 240 cm
(6 sheets, each one measuring
120 x 240 cm), 2013

In the Map of the Busy Gods, iconographic images are put together without taking into account spatial and temporal paradigms. A river crosses the territories of all kinds of divinities. Starting from those of Creation and descending towards the Chaos, we encounter the Earth and the natural elements. Beyond the mountains up north the Astral Gods overlook human chores such as Agriculture, Protection and War. On the southern riverside are placed Love, Wine and Art. Further east there is Hell, whereas the delta is ruled by the Sea Gods, and by the shore we can find Maternity preceded by Wisdom. This map looks like a geographical one, but the name of every land described on it reveals particular concepts or elements, each one surrounded by images of the gods related to it and that the different cultures have imagined and worshipped through history. The artist has titled this work Map of the Busy Gods because of the diffused tendency in every cultural context of creating deities according to people's needs, pretty much derived to humans' daily struggles. So, for example, in a fishermen's culture we could probably encounter gods related to the sea whereas in the hunters' traditions logically we would have divinities linked to woods and forests. At the center of Qiu Zhijie's map, Agriculture, which is the first conceptual area related to human life, stems from the natural elements. Farming leads our mind to fertility, not only the one related to the earth, but also the fertility of mankind. If the harvest is successful we are able to procreate more offspring; if farmers have a progeny that can work the land, then they will have more chances of having a good yield. A good harvest increases wealth, which naturally needs protection and generates preoccupation for preservation. Security and defensive mechanisms bring us to war, intuitively associated with death. The Gods of death are hence bordered on one side by the warrior deities and hell but, curiously enough, Art touches the western border of the infernal kingdoms. We would expect Maternity to be placed somewhere in between fertility and love, but in Qiu Zhijie's map this conceptual cell is placed along the seashore, before the point where the long river reaches and flows into the sea. This choice is related to the personal background of the artist, to the beliefs transmitted in the Chinese province where he was born. In Fujian, his home region, as well as in many southeastern coastal areas of China and neighboring areas in South East Asia, one of the most venerated goddess is Mazu, protectress of sailors and sea traders. Thought to have been a real person before becoming a goddess, Mazu is seen by many believers also as the reincarnation of Guanyin, the bodhisattva of compassion who is particularly worshipped amongst pregnant women and women in labor. As in all the other maps shown in this exhibition, the Map of busy Gods highlights a common denominator in all cultures across space and time, in this case the relationship between our daily lives and the mechanisms that rule our conception and projection of the divine.

Qiu Zhijie 邱志傑

The Unicorn and the Dragon

A map of the collections
of Fondazione Querini Stampalia,
Venice and Aurora Museum, Shanghai

curated by Chiara Bertola
and Davide Quadrio

Venice, Fondazione Querini Stampalia
May 29 / August 18 2013



2.

Map of Mythological Animals

ink dub rubbing on paper, 840 x 240 cm
(7 pieces, each one measuring
120 x 240 cm), 2013

In the Map of the Mythological Animals, the artist identifies the patterns that define the creation of magical zoomorphic entities in different cultures. The ramifications of the big tree that fill the map, lead us to the encounter of surprisingly limited and recurrent categories through which Qiu Zhijie organizes the mythological creatures he has come across during his research.

Stemming directly from the tree trunk, the biggest branches define the principal families, as in a genealogy tree: blend of humans and animals, humans and birds, humans and fish, animals hybrids and even animals and plants. Each one of these groups is then decomposed and analyzed in sub categories such as particular postures, symmetries, colors, number of heads, number of bodies or wings.

On the southwestern side of the map we can see the evolution and variations of the Unicorn, whilst on the upper eastern corner, amongst the winged beasts, Qiu Zhijie has displayed different kind of dragons. During the making of this map the artist has noticed that, according to their specific aspect and nature, the magical animals have been conferred with particular supernatural powers. For instance, those creatures born from a blending of a woman figure and a beast were thought to have the ability of predicting the future.

Through his artworks Qiu Zhijie encourages us to forget geography and chronology, discovering a real common ground between diverse cultures and the mechanisms that rule them. The artist sees in each of these maps a reminder of the most literal and etymological concept at the core of Taoism: the Tao, the way of the universe. Hence the maps show us the only way possible, the universality and limits of creation and imagination to which all cultures inevitably attain. For the same reason we bump into the presence of unicorns both in Asia and Europe, creatures that albeit with different forms represent the same pursuance of purity and sensitivity.

Qiu Zhijie 邱志傑

The Unicorn and the Dragon

A map of the collections
of Fondazione Querini Stampalia,
Venice and Aurora Museum, Shanghai

curated by Chiara Bertola
and Davide Quadrio

Venice, Fondazione Querini Stampalia
May 29 / August 18 2013



3.

Map of Tao and Objects

ink dub rubbing on paper, 240 x 240 cm
(2 sheets, each one measuring
120 x 240 cm), 2013
(Map on the left)

This map is divided in two parts, both of them full of objects of different provenance, form and nature. If we look carefully we can see that in the left part all the elements derive from a vertical cylinder, whereas on the right side of the map the cylinder is horizontal. Starting from this basic form, Qiu Zhijie has thought about actions that could modify this simple starting shape, transforming the cylinders in other objects. So if we stretch the vertical one and make it longer we can have a column, if we put a handle to the cylinder we will have a jar or if we put two handles and a lid on it we will have a pot, and the same happens with the horizontal cylinder. Some of the objects depicted in the map are typically Asian or Western tradition whilst many of them are present all over the globe. The cylinder, the very simple shape, is almost a metaphor of the most basic part of the human nature. We can modify it, differentiate it through different actions, but at the core we will still have the cylinders, either vertically or horizontally. The objects represented here are also surrounded by sinuous lines that, according to the artist, resemble the central line of division of the Taijitu, the universally known symbol that expresses the concept of yīnyáng. The Taijitu is also the emblem of Taoism and is often used by non-taoists to generally represent opposite forces coexisting in harmony.

Qiu Zhijie 邱志傑

The Unicorn and the Dragon

A map of the collections
of Fondazione Querini Stampalia,
Venice and Aurora Museum, Shanghai

curated by Chiara Bertola
and Davide Quadrio

Venice, Fondazione Querini Stampalia
May 29 / August 18 2013



4. Map of the travelling Tang Grass ink dub rubbing on paper, 2013

The idea for this map came from a book that Qiu Zhijie had been reading several times during the past twenty years, *The Sense of Order: A study in the psychology of Decorative Art* by Ernst Gombrich. In the map we can see many variations of the same decorative pattern, of an arabesque that can be found in almost every decorative expression of the world. In his text Gombrich states that this pattern had its origins in the Egyptian *Palmette*, and that, from there, the design reached Rome, the Arab world and finally the Far East where it was named Tang Grass by the Japanese. Qiu Zhijie though, in this case does not agree with Gombrich. In his opinion, the art historian was omitting in his theories many Asian references, such as the Shang Dynasty jades or the Yangshao pottery, that can prove wrong his idea of the pattern being invented in Egypt and travelling subsequently throughout the globe.

The Tang Grass pattern is extremely simple in its original version. It is almost an intuitive, instinctive way of drawing as it reflects natural forms as waves, clouds or plants. Hence, it is quite easy to imagine that artists not just in Egypt, but in many places across the earth were coming up with the same pattern, maybe at the same time and without acknowledging each other's existence.

Qiu Zhijie reconnects this "intuitive" creation with the Taoism and the etymology of Tao 道, which in Chinese combines the character of chuo 走 (or 辵), to go, and shou 首, head. The traditional interpretation of the 道 character signified a head going or to lead the way. For the Taoism to lead the way means to follow the only way, to accept that in the universe there is just one possible way of doing things. Qiu Zhijie applies this precept to his reading of different cultures and, in this case, also to the Tang Grass. This pattern is so widely known because it is related to the core of our human essence; it was the only pattern possible from which we could all have started.

Qiu Zhijie 邱志傑

The Unicorn and the Dragon

A map of the collections
of Fondazione Querini Stampalia,
Venice and Aurora Museum, Shanghai

curated by Chiara Bertola
and Davide Quadrio

Venice, Fondazione Querini Stampalia
May 29 / August 18 2013



5.
Unicorn #1
Murano glass sculpture, 2013

6.
Unicorn #2
camphor wood sculpture, 2013

In his practice Qiu Zhijie maintains a close relationship between creation and craftsmanship, and in his mapping of cultures he has explored the traditional techniques which are here narrated by the two sculptures in display: the unicorn in camphorwood characterized by a Chinese iconography, is made with typically Asian materials and techniques, whilst the unicorn conceived by the Western tradition has been created with Murano glass by the master Pino Signoretto. The two sculptures featured in the exhibition are the first pieces of an ongoing project titled *100 Unicorns*. The first artwork produced was the Murano glass European Unicorn, following a design conceived by Qiu Zhijie. In a second stage the artist commissioned another sculpture to a Chinese wood carver, with the only condition being that the artwork should have been different from the previous one but still representing the same mythological animal. We encounter unicorns also in the Chinese tradition, although they are not horses with a horn as in Europe. One of these Chinese unicorns is a particular creature called Bixie or Tianlu, which, surprisingly, in some representations among the Aurora collection appears to be similar to the Saint Mark's lion.

The resulting design was a Chinese Unicorn, made of camphor wood, a typical material of Chinese origins. This wood has an extremely characteristic scent that pervades the room in which the sculpture is placed, allowing the visitors to sense its presence before experiencing its sight.

After the exhibition presented at the Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Qiu Zhijie will keep on involving craftsmen working with diverse media and skills in the making of an atlas of one hundred Unicorns' representations, that will be gradually integrated with new creatures conceived with the aim of breaking the recurrent patterns of imagination.

Qiu Zhijie 邱志傑

The Unicorn and the Dragon

A map of the collections
of Fondazione Querini Stampalia,
Venice and Aurora Museum, Shanghai

curated by Chiara Bertola
and Davide Quadrio

Venice, Fondazione Querini Stampalia
May 29 / August 18 2013



7.

Map of the Boats Story

ink rubbing on paper, 240 × 240cm
(2 sheets each one measuring
120 × 240 cm), 2013
(Map on the right)

In this map Qiu Zhijie reproduces the story of boats, starting from a fish and arriving to futuristic space ships. This work is also a reminder of an exhibition that the artist had the opportunity to visit when he came to the Fondazione Querini Stampalia in the spring of 2013 while he was carrying out his research in linking together elements of this institution with the permanent collection of antic Chinese Art of the Aurora Museum of Shanghai. The exhibition displayed at Querini Stampalia at the time was *Navi, Squeri, Traghetti da Jacopo De' Barbari*, in which Qiu Zhijie had the opportunity to see the different kind of boats that were historically used in the Serenissima. Boats and ships are also very much related to the exhibition as, in this project the artist is not working solely on the collections of the Querini Stampalia and the Aurora Museum, but is also building bridges between Venice and Shanghai, two cities that have historically been open to other cultures because of their position on the sea and the importance of their harbors. Qiu Zhijie himself has a close link to the sea, as his home region, Fujian, was always characterized by its sea traders and was visited and praised as a *heaven of commerce* by Marco Polo during his travels to China.

Qiu Zhijie 邱志傑

The Unicorn and the Dragon

A map of the collections
of Fondazione Querini Stampalia,
Venice and Aurora Museum, Shanghai

curated by Chiara Bertola
and Davide Quadrio

Venice, Fondazione Querini Stampalia
May 29 / August 18 2013



8.
Map of Domestic Zoomorphology
ink rubbing on paper, 240 × 240 cm
(2 sheets of 120 × 240 cm), 2013

Another characteristic shared by different cultures, and highlighted by Qiu Zhijie in this exhibition, is the zoomorphology applied to daily life objects. In this occasion as well, as in the *Map of Tao and Objects*, the artist analyses the different multicultural variations that men apply to a particular form or shape when trying to change it and make it useful, by adding a handle, a lid, a spout. All the works in the exhibition *The Unicorn and the Dragon* are somehow linked one to the other, in the same way as in every single map, the different conceptual cells are connected together. The idea of this domestic 'zoo' is associated to the creatures that we see in the *Map of Mythological Animals*, which both connects with the *Unicorn* series of sculptures and with the *Map of the Busy Gods*.

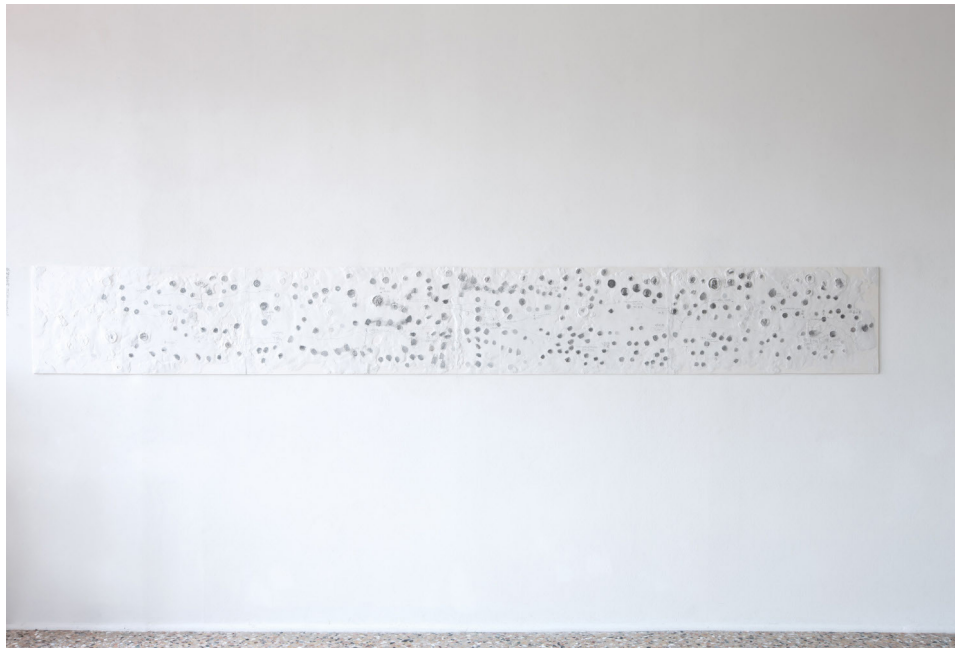
Qiu Zhijie 邱志傑

The Unicorn and the Dragon

A map of the collections
of Fondazione Querini Stampalia,
Venice and Aurora Museum, Shanghai

curated by Chiara Bertola
and Davide Quadrio

Venice, Fondazione Querini Stampalia
May 29 / August 18 2013



9.
Map of Micro Monuments
pencil frottage on paper, 2013

For Qiu Zhijie coins are small monuments, they make us remember historical moments and characters that kingdoms rulers and governments want us, focused on the build-up of collective memories. There are recurrent patterns in the making of a coin, such as the nature and meaning of the sentences chosen to be on them, some representing solemn vows, other blessing the masses. The myriads of animals that for centuries have been depicted on coins and medals have enriched them with many iconographic meanings, linked to religions, to national emblems or to heraldic symbols. The artists does not forget to mention the different categories of characters that appear on coins: Kings, Queens, national heroes and, in socialist countries, the people. To integrate this *Map of Micro Monuments*, executed with a pencil frottage of the coins that are set in a layer of grout behind the paper, the artist has also created plaster casts of coins and medals belonging to the Querini Stampalia Collection.

Qiu Zhijie 邱志傑

The Unicorn and the Dragon

A map of the collections
of Fondazione Querini Stampalia,
Venice and Aurora Museum, Shanghai

curated by Chiara Bertola
and Davide Quadrio

Venice, Fondazione Querini Stampalia
May 29 / August 18 2013



10.
Map of Origins and Human Processes
ink, 2013

Qiu Zhijie decided to draw this map directly on the wall. We can see displayed here all the materials that we can find in nature, and that men have transformed over the centuries through the elaboration of an incredible number of processes and methodologies. At the center of the map, a circular range of mountains encloses the idea of *material*, surrounded by *usage* and *application*. All the raw materials extant in nature are a gift from the Mother Earth, that is why Qiu Zhijie has decided to make this map vaguely resemble a feminine sexual organ, referring to the Origins mentioned in the title.

Qiu Zhijie 邱志傑

The Unicorn and the Dragon

A map of the collections
of Fondazione Querini Stampalia,
Venice and Aurora Museum, Shanghai

curated by Chiara Bertola
and Davide Quadrio

Venice, Fondazione Querini Stampalia
May 29 / August 18 2013



11. Eternal Memory of a Venetian Column

ink rubbing on paper, 2013

On a serendipitous occasion, during the preparation of the exhibition *The Unicorn and the Dragon*, a cartography of the collections of Fondazione Querini Stampalia, Venice, and the Aurora Museum, Shanghai, Qiu Zhijie stumbled upon an inscription beneath a portico, engraved by a gondolier back in 1864 to perpetrate in eternal memory an exceptional event.

ETERNA / MEMORIA / DELL'ANNO / 1864 DEL / GIACCIO / VEDUTO IN / VENEZIA / CHE SE STA SU LE FONDA / MENTE NOVE A SAN CRISTOFORO / ANDAVA LA / GENTE IN PROCI / SION CHE FORMAVAN UN LI / STON

To the eternal memory of the year 1864, of the ice seen in Venice that was on the Fondamenta Nuove and reached the isle of San Cristoforo where people was going as in a procession and making the canals look like a promenade. – This event is remembered as the “great ice”. The column where the message was carved is under a portico, Sotoportego del Traghetto, which overlooks Rio Santi Apostoli.

This sentence was engraved to remember the day when the lagoon froze with such strong and thick ice that people could walk on it and pull carts along the canals. The years went by and a fire hid this memento covering it up with a layer of ashes that we still can notice and feel on the original surface, making the carved letters almost unperceivable to the naked eye and unnoticeable in frantic rhythm of our daily lives. This message from the past was suddenly disclosed when it was transferred on the paper, highlighting the letters that finally reappeared after more than a century. The dab rubbing technique with which the artist executed this work, was traditionally used in China to transpose the stone engravings on a paper support, so that the precepts of the ancestors would not get lost because of the wind and other adverse weather conditions, or simply to preserve them from the corrosive action of time.

All the maps exhibited in the show have been designed following precise reference systems, based on significance and forms, extrapolated by the incredible sources contained both in the Fondazione Querini Stampalia and in the Aurora Museum. Qiu Zhijie displays these references on his cartographies, accurately finding relationships and paths that link each one of the symbols or concepts represented. In this particular work though, the artist was subjected to the unexpected exactly as the viewer. The meaning of the message left on the column was clear just after the dab rubbing intervention, bringing us back to the very core and mission of this technique. The ink dab rubbing was primarily used to transport on paper the lapidary inscriptions, not to lose the precepts of our predecessors and with this whimsical discovery the artist has reconnected his own traditions to an alien past, in a foreign land.

Qiu Zhijie 邱志傑

The Unicorn and the Dragon

A map of the collections
of Fondazione Querini Stampalia,
Venice and Aurora Museum, Shanghai

curated by Chiara Bertola
and Davide Quadrio

Venice, Fondazione Querini Stampalia
May 29 / August 18 2013



12. Images from the Fondazione Querini Stampalia and the Aurora Museum Collections

The site-specific works by Qiu Zhijie, as well as all the previous contemporary art projects included in the program *Conserving the Future*, developed at Fondazione Querini Stampalia since the year 2000, are designed in relation to the objects within the permanent collection. In this case, the comparison and analysis are extended even further by building conceptual and stylistic bridges between the works of the Venetian foundation and the valuable collection of ancient Asian Art at the Aurora Museum of Shanghai.

The selection of images belonging to the two collections, projected in this room, helps the visitor to retrace the formal hints that have guided and inspired the artist. Amongst these pictures we can see the Map of Venice by Jacopo de' Barbari. One of the eleven extant original prints known belongs to the Fondazione Querini Stampalia, and it is exhibited on this occasion in an open dialogue with Qiu Zhijie's artworks. Looking at the maps of the artist, the comparison with the organicity and fluidity of the sinuous and dense map of Venice comes naturally. Qiu Zhijie draws up his maps detecting a system of typological classification of cells that are consolidated, each one with the others, in a similar way as the places that form the urban texture of the Serenissima.

Qiu Zhijie 邱志傑

The Unicorn and the Dragon

A map of the collections
of Fondazione Querini Stampalia,
Venice and Aurora Museum, Shanghai

curated by Chiara Bertola
and Davide Quadrio

Venice, Fondazione Querini Stampalia
May 29 / August 18 2013



The dub rubbing technique

Qiu Zhijie was educated as a calligrapher, his particular relationship and admiration for the traditions of the past is most likely linked to this facet of his education since a great deal of calligraphers training consists of repetition and reproduction of old texts from the past. The dub rubbing technique, that the artist has predominantly used for the production of the maps included in this exhibition, is also very much linked to calligraphy as it was traditionally used to render gravestone inscriptions on paper. The process used to achieve the results we can appreciate in Qiu Zhijie's maps, is realized by applying a sheet of paper on a stone or – as in the case of some of the works here exhibited – on carved wood or laser cut tiles. With the help of a paste made with water and starch, the paper adheres to the stone or tiles until it is tamped into the engravings. Subsequently the artist dips in ink a cloth wad and, gently padding with it, the ink gradually covers the paper without sinking into the engravings. When the paper is peeled off, the engravings are highlighted on it in white, whereas everything else acquires the ink black color.