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CHINA'S FORGOTTEN KINGDOM

A touring exhibition

 THE UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHAMPTON
School of The Arts

 中国传媒大学
COMMUNICATION UNIVERSITY OF CHINA

Avenue Gallery
18th March – 12th April
The University of Northampton
Avenue Campus
St Georges Avenue
Northampton
NN2 6JD

Bankside Gallery
23rd – 28th April
48 Hopton Street
London
SE1 9JH

RBSA Gallery
6th – 18th May
Royal Birmingham Society of Artists
4 Brook Street, St Paul's
Birmingham
B3 1SA

CUC Gallery
23rd – 25th October
Communication University of China
1 Dingfuzhuang East Street
Chaoyang District
Beijing
10024
P.R. China

Museum of Naxi Dongba Culture
16th December – 5th January 2014
Museum of Naxi Dongba Culture
Heilong Tan
Lijiang
China



'THE LOST VALLEY' PICTOGRAPH
— MR. HE LIMIN

China's current "5 year plan" is the nation's first to mention the vast cultural heritage of her peoples. As a result of this new interest, The University of Northampton (UN) was invited by the city of Lijiang to work in conjunction with the city and the Communication University of China (CUC), to explore ways in which the culture of the Naxi people could be recorded, promoted and understood.

The objectives were to build a long term relationship between UN, the city and people of Lijiang, and CUC in Beijing, for the purpose of a three way exchange of knowledge and culture to inform academic and creative practices in each centre.

Dongba is the main religion of the Naxi people, and it uses a pictograph-based language to document narratives, dance and music. Dongba scholars have recently discovered additional sites of Neolithic cave paintings in the Jinsha river valley, and are working on links between these ancient forms and those of the pictographs that are still in use today. This research interest provided the perfect vehicle for cooperation between UN, CUC and Lijiang. The project was to look at the cave paintings, and how the creation of those images related to the way in which the Dongba pictographs are created to this day. The journey was also to extend to the use of that Dongba script by current practitioners in Lijiang as the basis for art works that preserve an awareness of the pictographs and folk stories, but in a new context, and for a wider audience.

Using artists and practitioners rather than scientists to understand the creation of cave paintings and ancient scripts provided a fresh insight. But the project went further. Instead of confining itself to academic input, a team of seven students from the School of The Arts were taken out to China along with an ITV film crew to record footage for a documentary. The students were able to bring a different perspective to the research, but also provided a strong dynamic for building the relationship between the respective organisations.

The project has resulted in the establishment of research centres in Northampton, Beijing and Lijiang, together with the UK touring exhibition of Naxi artworks which exhibits in Northampton, London and Birmingham, and is captured within this publication. The human interest story generated by the student's involvement has led to ITV investing in the production of a documentary show reel which has already attracted interest in the UK, and a commitment to air in China. The project has been covered by Anglia and Central TV in a mini-series within the 6 o'clock news, resulting in broad exposure for the Naxi people and their culture. In gratitude for this work, the City of Lijiang is sending five officials to Northampton in March 2013 to enter into a Friendship agreement with the town, and to discuss closer ties with UN. By taking a long term view, and by working with students and practitioners to cross the cultural divide, the project has laid the foundations for a long term ongoing relationship that will benefit the participants and their students. ●



Paul Middleton is Executive Dean and Dean of the School of The Arts at The University of Northampton. He carries overall corporate responsibility for Intellectual Capital and leads the University's Arts provision which includes Art, Fashion, Design, Media, English, Journalism, Dance, Music, Acting and Drama. He has exhibited widely within the UK, Europe, North America and Australia and has been the recipient of the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council's Awards. He has carried out commissioned work for private collectors including the Justice of The Supreme Court, The Right Hon the Baroness Hale of Richmond. His achievements within the fields of Art and Design and the Higher Education sector have connected him with universities in the UK, Europe and Russia as external examiner, specialist advisor, and subject reviewer. His research interests include the exploration of visual language through practice

and ephemeral short life design, with outputs which span conference papers, exhibitions and publications. He is an executive member of the Conference for Higher Education in Art and Design and has 20+ years experience of senior management roles in the Higher Education sector.

Work in progress:
Investigation of Neolithic cave painting site in Lijiang, Yunnan Province China. The investigation explores cave marks and the links between cave paintings and the visual language of Naxi People. The site is due to be flooded in 2013 when the paintings will be lost. Middleton leads a team including ITV documentary filmmakers, research students, scholars and artists into the field to explore links between the different forms of visual language. Project sponsored by The University of Northampton, the Chinese Government, ITV. October 2012.

TIGER LEAPING GORGE



The research question addresses the possible link between mesolithic cave paintings recently located in the remote Tiger Leaping Gorge, Yunnan Province, China and the local 4500 image, pictograph alphabet of the Dongba Minority People who inhabit the province. The question is addressed through a drawing practitioner's perspective.

The pictograph language, uniquely, is still practiced today through a range of activities including ritual to the central focus of the practicing artists. The region possesses mesolithic drawings which are located along the Jinsha River [a primary tributary of the Yangtze] and span a distance of almost 200 kms. These sites, which are in remote locations, have only recently become the focus of academic study and preservation. Often very hard to access – as the sites are located on the side of high cliffs – archaeological investigations are taking place to document these artefacts, and substantial outputs are yet to be published. At present, the area remains under-researched. In addition, Government-supported access is very unusual and highly restrictive.

This project has gained access to one site in Tiger Leaping Gorge [TLG], which is thought to be the deepest natural gorge in the world, located at an elevation of 15000 feet. In October 2012, a team led by the PI, Middleton, gained access to the site supported by the Chinese Government and in collaboration with the Communications University of China in Beijing. The 23-team members that entered this location were selected for their creative skills, and archaeologists joined the group from the Institute for Chinese Cultural Studies in Lijiang, Yunnan, China to ensure ethical protocols were observed. An ITV documentary crew who recorded the experiences, producing a narrative of the team's exploits also accompanied the team.

From an established archaeological perspective, the TLG site is considered

to be of lower value than sites elsewhere, because many of the images have been corrupted due to rock face erosion – put simply, the images are now incomplete. However, Middleton believes these images are of high value due to the use of different forms of visual language [to other sites], characterised by drawings produced with high fluidity depicting landscape, humans and objects as well as animals. Other sites are restricted to animal reference. An added issue is that the site is likely to be flooded to make way for hydroelectric dams that are being built in the area. Consequently the site will be lost.

The enquiry draws upon the skills and knowledge of the creative practitioners to provide a different understanding of how and why these drawings were produced. This work is advancing through deductive and analytical drawings and photographic techniques which seek to hypothesise the missing elements. Drawing upon transcribed conversation with the minority Naxi People, especially their leaders who populate the area and and practice the pictograph language, Middleton seeks to explore potential links between the cave drawings and the pictograph alphabet. Hey Limin, a celebrated Dongba Leader, believes a link exists and it is articulated through narratives across the Dongba generations. However, concrete evidence which one may expect to find in shared shape and form, is difficult to identify.

The enquiry seeks to establish the links between the cave paintings and the Dongba pictograph and beyond to how a visual language has contributed to the development of a culture. The corpus of the visual culture embraces ceremonies, rituals, artefacts, manuscripts and the region's contemporary practicing artists. This investigation takes a practitioner's perspective in an attempt to decode the outputs of the corpus through the explorations of its visual language. ●

JAYNE BINGHAM



TIGER LEAPING
GORGE STUDIES
OCTOBER 2012



Jayne Bingham is a Deputy Dean in the School of The Arts at The University of Northampton and has previously worked at the University of Lincoln, Norwich University College of the Arts and De Montfort University in a range of management roles associated with art, design and media. She is a graduate of the Slade School of Fine Art and the University of London's Institute of Education, and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of the Arts. Her research interests are practice based and concerned with drawing as intervention. Thematically, work is focused on perceptions of place and 'collections' that evolve from our associations and experiences of both urban environments and the landscape. Exhibitions include the one person show 'Drawing the Outside Edge'

at The Leonard Pearlstein Gallery in Philadelphia USA and The Drawn-Out Gallery, International Drawing Research Institute, NSW Australia (2007) and 'All Over The Place: Drawing Place, Drawing Space', at the University of the West of England (2008) and the Stanley & Audrey Burton Gallery, Leeds (2010), a group show of drawings made in relation to considerations of place, co-convened with Dr. Judith Tucker. In addition to a studio practice, she has organised several exhibitions of American artists in the UK, and is a member of LAND2, a creative, practice-led national research network of artists, academics and research students who are interested in the contemporary landscape, place-oriented art practice and related themes of memory, place and identity.

literal in translation and quite direct, others more delightfully susceptible to the influences of a more modern life, though all maintaining an allegiance to their source.

It was also interesting to see how the Lijiang artists are sustaining their legacy of making visible this cultural heritage, through continuing to engage with the traditions of the apprentice and the studio assistant; the concept of the master and the master class.

The artists shared their enthusiasms and commitment through discussion, and generously through a demonstration of techniques, highlighting the mutual dependence and importance the process of making, or constructing, has to the ideas that ultimately remain the reason for the work. Our own students were able to participate in some of these technical workshops, working under the tutelage of craftsman, to understand for themselves the very particular means of constructing a painting, or carving, through methods and skills unusual within an art and design practice in the UK.

Whilst important traditions and cultural identities informed much of the work seen, as well as the artists continuous engagement with such influence, the contemporary world was also present through reference to domestic and well known urban locations, and to familiar objects, placing the work in recognisable situations. Across some portfolios of practice, there was a strong sense of an emergent coexistence of the Naxi culture as a history, and also as a commentary of very new interpretations, as a means to engage with a broader audience.

The intensity of the practice of the Lijiang artists is striking, and there is a strong presence of labour in their art; a sense of something needing to be worked at for a period of time; a success that is reliant on a mastery of method and skill for a high production value. All these elements also have an equal value.

Meeting these dedicated artists, who have such commitment to their heritage, proved to be a very lasting and significant aspect of the visit. ●

The ancient city of Lijiang and its regional territories, presented themselves through a great richness of extraordinary and everyday experiences, as staff and students from the School of The Arts travelled across substantial areas of urban and natural landscape. Ever filming, drawing and photographing, our obsessive industry on one level, matched that of those who laboured across their farmland either to harvest or protect their crops. The same, but of course very different.

Here and there, in some rural area surrounded by orchards, or within the city itself, we would meet local artists in their working environment of the studio or workshop and for whom the traditions of the Naxi culture and the Dongba religion remain a powerful subject, providing significant meaning to their practice. Artists were making paintings, drawings, sculpture and carvings as well as architectural interventions to impact on interior spaces in domestic environments. Work was continuing to emerge from the symbolism of the pictograph language and the many narratives associated with the Naxi culture; some remaining



Academically a Historian, professionally an Accountant, vocationally an Artist, and occasionally a Racing Driver. After reading History at Downing College Cambridge, Graham qualified as a Chartered Accountant with Coopers and Lybrand, specialising in public sector audit works and corporate tax. Moving into industry he headed up the finance function in a SME based in the construction industry, before entering the very different world of Higher Education management. After

a spell as the Finance Director in an independent residential School for children with severe learning difficulties, Graham returned to the HE sector, joining the management team of the School of The Arts at The University of Northampton in October 2009. Throughout his time working as an applied accountant, Graham has pursued a parallel interest in fine art, creating and exhibiting work across the UK, including a number of solo exhibitions. A reimagining of the idea of painting by numbers.

students from a variety of disciplines from within the School responded in their own individual ways to the intense visual and cultural stimulus that the Naxi way of life provides. It was immensely satisfying to see how the team came together and also how they reached out to the practising artists of Lijiang, engaging in a dialogue between practitioners.

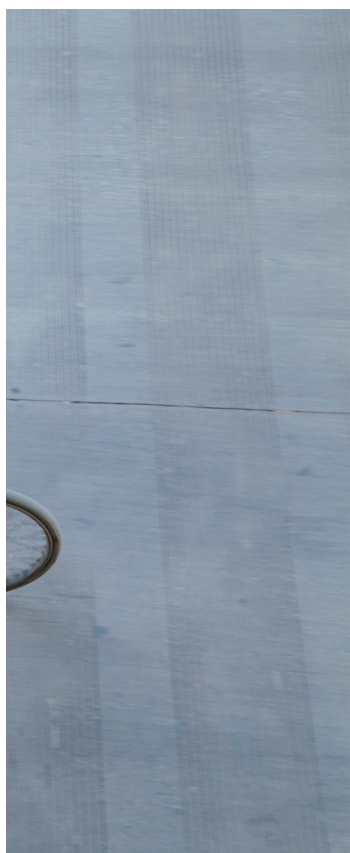
My own response to the region was informed by making the two trips eight months apart. I was astounded by how much things had changed in Lijiang in such a relatively short time. Roads had been surfaced, new housing built, and it is perhaps not surprising in the face of such rapid change that some striking juxtaposition can be found between what was and what is. Rural labourers ploughing with oxen whilst talking on a mobile phone, salted yak meat traded with Tibet for centuries, sold next door to an American fast food outlet, and the ubiquitous picture of Mao Zedong now being sold alongside one of David Beckham.

In the light of my own as yet unresolved reflections upon the two trips, I welcome the visit to the UK of a travelling exhibition of artworks from members of the Artists Association of Lijiang. The work has come out of the same cultural melting pot that we briefly observed, and reflects both the beauty of, and the challenges facing the town and region of Lijiang. ●

In February of 2012 I was privileged to be a part of a team from the School of The Arts that was invited to go to China. We were guests of the people and government of Lijiang and the Communication University of China, and our hosts made us feel very welcome. The purpose of that initial trip was to introduce us to the rich and varied culture of the Naxi people who live in a remote region of south west China, nestled in the foothills of the Himalaya.

The ancient city of Lijiang which is at the heart of the semi-autonomous region inhabited by the Naxi, is a UNESCO world heritage site, and its unquestionable charms have become a magnet for tourism within China. As this influx has opened up the region to global influences, the traditional way of life of the Naxi, including their adherence to the Dongba religion, has come increasingly under pressure. As a result, The University of Northampton was asked to look at ways in which we could help to document and preserve a rapidly disappearing world.

Within the School of The Arts we like to put students at the heart of everything that we do, so rather than return to China with a purely academic team, a decision was made to take a group of students to Lijiang in October. The result was an interesting mix, as





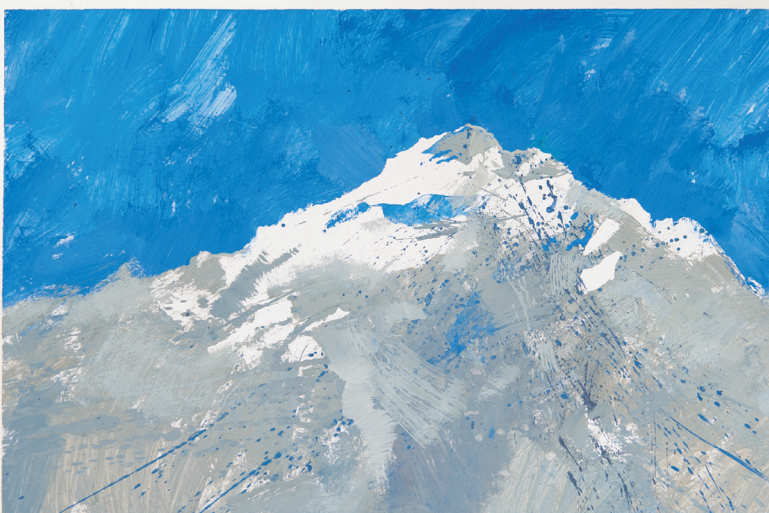
10.45AM WEDNESDAY
24 OCTOBER 2012.
JADE DRAGON SNOW
MOUNTAIN, NEAR LIJIANG,
SOUTH WEST CHINA.



10-45am, Wednesday 24 October 2012. Jade Dragon Snow Mountain, near Lijiang, South West China.

Robert Perry

11.40AM, WEDNESDAY
24 OCTOBER 2012.
SACRED MOUNTAIN.
JADE DRAGON MOUNTAIN
NEAR LIJIANG,
SOUTH WEST CHINA.



11-40am, Wednesday 24 October 2012. Sacred Mountain, Jade Dragon Snow Mountain near Lijiang, South West China.

Robert Perry



3-30pm, Monday 22 October 2012. View of Lijiang from the Elephant Mountain. On the skyline, left to right, Camel Mountain and twin peaks of the Saddle Mountain.

Robert Perry

3.30PM, MONDAY 22 OCTOBER 2012.
VIEW OF LIJIANG FROM THE ELEPHANT
MOUNTAIN. ON THE SKYLINE, LEFT TO
RIGHT, CAMEL MOUNTAIN AND TWIN
PEAKS OF THE SADDLE MOUNTAIN.



3-25pm, Wednesday 24 October 2012. View towards Lijiang with the Camel and Saddle Mountains.

3.25PM, WEDNESDAY 24 OCTOBER 2012.
VIEW TOWARDS LIJIANG WITH THE
CAMEL AND SADDLE MOUNTAINS.

Robert Perry is a landscape painter in the English tradition, travelling widely throughout Europe with his famous “mobile studio”. A prominent member of the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists, he works exclusively on location, producing vigorous paintings and drawings of the European landscape and the effects wrought upon it by light, season and atmosphere. The scope of his work is exceptionally wide, but he is particularly noted for his unorthodox techniques, panoramic views of the ‘Black Country’, his “Night Paintings” and his work in the First and Second World War Battlefields. His impressive list of solo

exhibitions include Dudley Art Gallery, Wolverhampton City Art Gallery, Galeria Afinsa Almirante, Madrid, Espace Culturel d’ Albert, Le Centre Mondial de la Paix, Verdun, Der Volksbank Halle, Rheinland Pfalz, RBSA Gallery, Birmingham, Astley Hall Museum and Art Gallery, Durham City Art Gallery, Blackburn Art Gallery, Birmingham City Art Gallery and the Council of Europe, Strasbourg. For further information and footage of his appearances on British and French Television please visit Rob’s website at: www.robertperry-artist.co.uk

the world’s deepest river canyons. The working time in the Gorge was restricted, partly due to its remoteness, rugged terrain and difficulty of access, as well as other objectives incorporated within the expedition 11

The students, studying variously for Degree, MA or PhD were allocated tasks according to their particular disciplines, interests, skills and previous archaeological experience.

There were a number of powerful impressions which this trip made upon me. The first, and possibly the most intense, was the incredible hardship with which those cave dwellers had to contend, hardships dictated primarily by geographical and environmental circumstances. This was what my drawings began to reveal to me as they progressed.

The second was the nature of the Naxi People and the Dongba religion with its close relationship with nature and the environment which, in spite of its roots far back in history, is still very relevant to the dilemmas and problems we face today. This relevance is exemplified in the following passage which I saw in the studio of the sculptor Yong Yu and have transcribed below (retaining its slightly stilted translation into English).

“According to the Dongba Scriptures, the god who was in charge of the creatures in nature was named Shu. This God of Shu was the brother of half blood with the human being. Later due to the over-use of the nature resources by the human being, Shu revenged the human being with disasters. Thus Dingbashiluo, who was the master of Dongba religion and his envoy Da Peng bird were invited to the earth to mediate the conflicts. With mediation, the nature and the human being reached the agreement for harmonious co-existence for generations since then.”

The third impression was the team spirit which the project generated amongst not only the students but also the three delightful girls who acted as interpreters and Dr Yan Junqi and the other Chinese participants.

The fourth impression was the extraordinary fortitude I observed of the ordinary people of China whose simple life of struggle, sheer hard work, improvisation and ingenuity is both breathtaking and humbling. ●

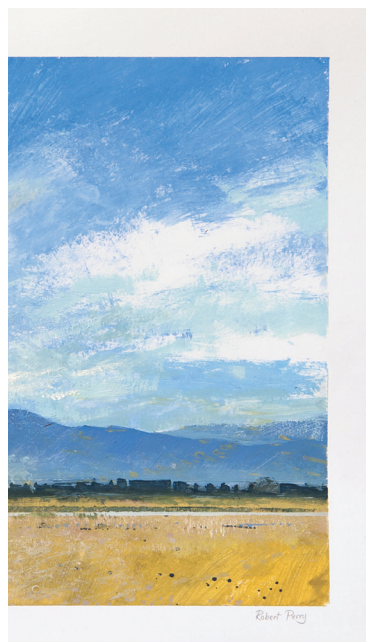
Early in 2012, I was approached by The University of Northampton and commissioned to act as one of the leaders in a student research expedition to Lijiang in South West China.

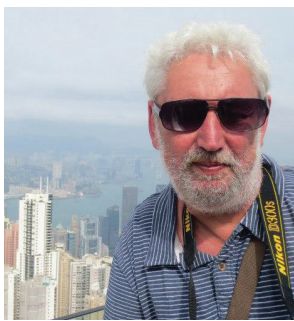
The primary objectives of the expedition were to travel to Tiger Leaping Gorge in a remote area beyond the City and, using drawing, painting, photography, video and archaeological techniques, to record and analyze a group of prehistoric cave-dwellings and the remains of the wall paintings made by their inhabitants. We were also looking for links with the pictogram writings and culture of the indigenous Naxi People and their ancient Dongba religion.

My long experience of working exclusively on location as an investigative landscape painter, studying and recording the effects on the environment of climate and human activity has included work on various prehistoric and archaeological sites such as the Dordogne valley and the Bronze Age copper-mines on the Great Orme in North Wales.

In view of this experience I was tasked (alongside inherent pastoral involvement) with making drawn and painted studies of the caves and the immediate and regional terrain in which the cave-dwellers had lived.

The gorge itself has been carved out by the Jinsha River, a primary tributary of the upper Yangtze and is one of





Frazer is a politics graduate from the University of York, who went into radio journalism in 1983 and moved to TV news in 1989 with Central Television. For a number of years he was Producer of the nightly news programme Central News, presented by Bob Warman, before moving into programme-making. As well as heading up Central's regional programmes unit, he has made a number of network documentaries for ITV, including *The Secret Life of Princess Margaret*, *Real Crime* with Mark Austin and

Nightwatch with Steve Scott. Five years ago, he put together a pitch for a country programme on ITV called "Small Island, Big Country" – ITV's Director of Television Peter Fincham commissioned an initial series of 36 programmes and the name was changed to *Countrywise*. Frazer has since directed more than 50 episodes of the show, as well as episodes of the spinoff series *Countrywise Kitchen*. He is married with two daughters and lives in Solihull.

This was an amazing opportunity to go to the other side of the world and to make a film that matters: I hope it will play some role, however small, in helping to preserve and protect a precious part of China's heritage.

The scenery in Yunnan was as spectacular as I have ever seen or recorded in more than 20 years of film-making: jaw-dropping mountains and valleys, farming scenes straight out of the Middle Ages, and some awe-inspiring architecture. It was an absolute gift as far as making movies goes, especially topped with those vivid blue skies and a light that was often quite dazzling.

But the most special part about this exercise was the people: both those we travelled with from Northampton, and the people of Lijiang. The Dongba practitioners we met were gentle, kind souls and the Naxi folk generally were warm and welcoming – if a little curious about what we were up to!

Professor Yan and his team could not have done more to make things work smoothly in spite of the inevitable obstacles. They helped us to overcome cultural and linguistic barriers which might otherwise have made this a difficult undertaking.

The team from the University could not have been more welcoming and inclusive – often as a film-maker you

are an outsider, but Nicky and I were fully paid-up members of the UoN squad right from the start.

The journey is a killer – 12 hours to Hong Kong and then a further two flights with long waits in between – but it's worth it. The remoteness of Lijiang is a part of its charm, and it is the fact that Yunnan Province borders Burma and Tibet that makes this area such a fascinating cultural melting pot.

We shot 20 hours of material, from which the 23 minute film is edited, which meant working some long days (and nights): but when you go that far and are confronted with such a landscape, city and culture it's hard not to shoot everything that moves. And as with all foreign shoots, if you miss any vital shots, it's a long way to go back for them!

I have nothing but praise for the subjects in our film, for our Chinese hosts and for our university team mates – working with them was a great pleasure, and despite the occasional test of both character and stamina, I can't remember a cross word in the whole fortnight.

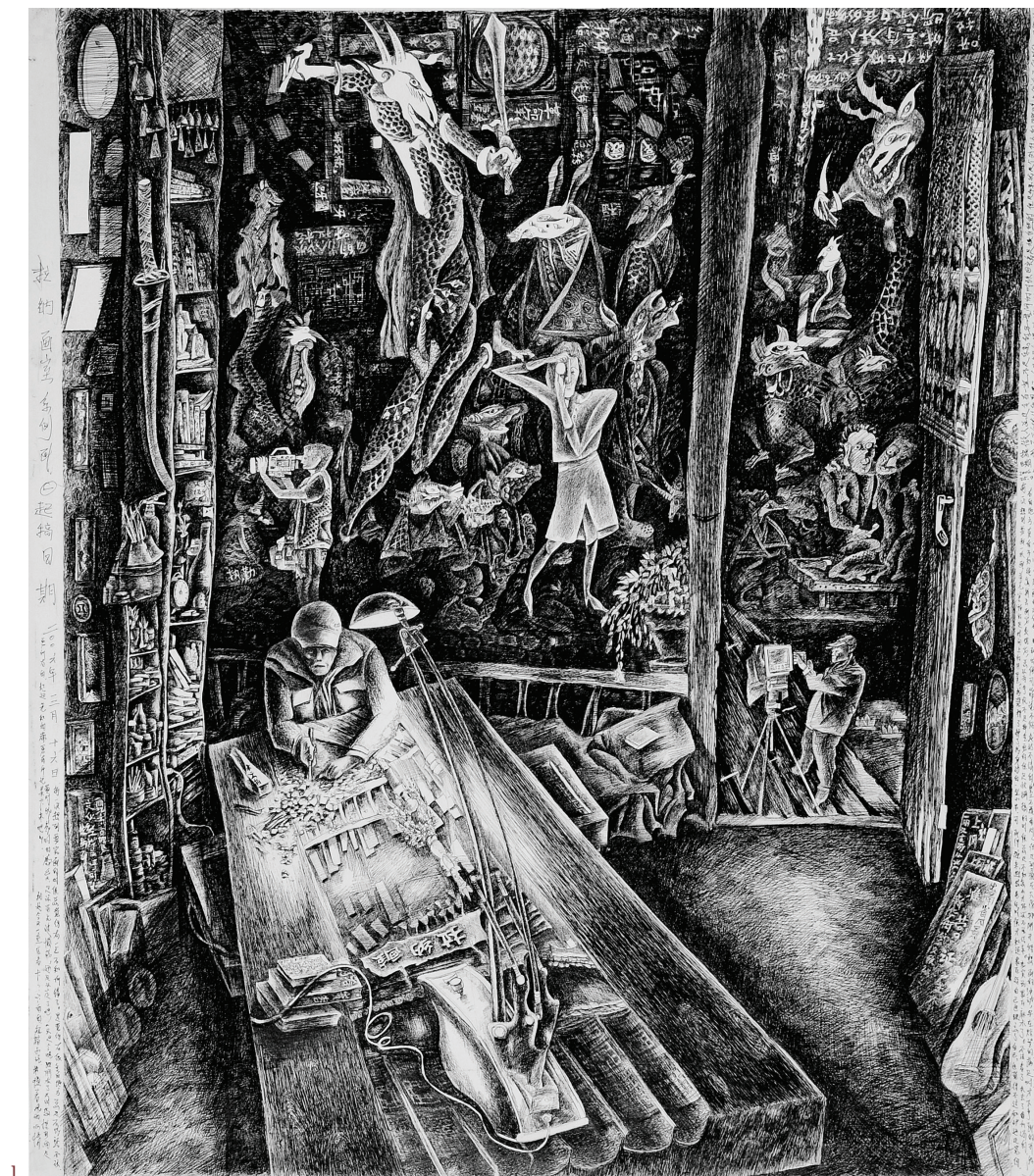
My sincerest thanks to Paul Middleton and his staff at the School of The Arts for giving me an opportunity of a lifetime: I hope that "The Forgotten Kingdom" is a fitting reward for their investment. ●

Naxi artists





Born on April 27 1975, in Lijiang, Yunbai Mu is a member of the Naxi minority and he graduated from junior school in 1994. Following the earthquake that devastated Lijiang in 1996, Mu set up the Lana studio in Xinhua Street of The Old Town, and started creating carvings and paintings to record what was left of his beloved city. In 2007 he moved back to his hometown just outside of Lijiang, establishing the Lana Art Gallery. Since then he has spent five years working on a 30-meter-length wood carving called "The Old Town" which depicts the history of Lijiang from foundation up to the present day. He has also created more than 80 illustrative pieces documenting his surroundings, his culture and the pressures that both face.

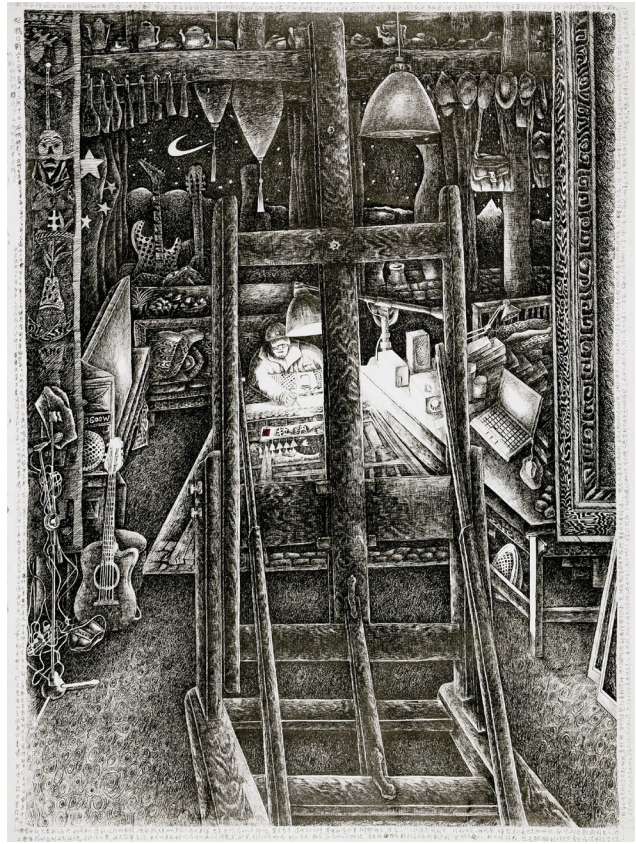


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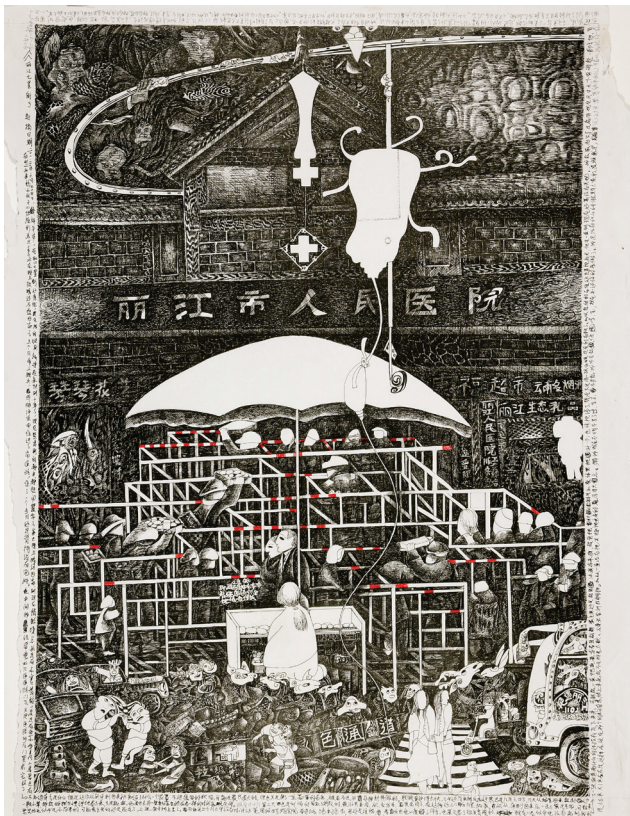
1. CREATING IN LA NA STUDIO — Paper and ink, 70x60cm, 2006
2. GUARDIAN OF THE HOMELAND — Paper and ink, 90x80cm
3. UNTITLED — Acrylic mix gouache on Gaoli paper, 51x90cm, 1991
4. SEVEN STARS STREET — Paper and ink, 90x80cm, 2012
5. THE ART STUDIO OF LA NA — Paper and ink, 90x80cm, 2006



2



3



4



5



Born in 1974, in Lijiang, He grew up in a traditional Naxi family and was very fond of the culture of the Naxi. At the age of 15, he started to learn carving from local artists, and became a member of the Lijiang Dongba institute. He spent 10 years under the tutelage of the Dongba master, He Limin. During this time he studied pictographs, carving, painting, dancing and religion, visiting many local masters and immersing himself in the culture.

In 1999, he established "The workshop of Dongba He" in Lijiang Old Town. His work is heavily influenced by his religious training, with inspiration being drawn from Naxi folk tales and the Dongba pictographs.



1



2

1. THE FROG — Wood carving, 67x46cm, 2012
2. THE TRUMPET SHELL — Wood carving, 67x46cm, 2012
3. THE ROC — Wood carving, 102x68cm, 2012





Born in 1978, in Lijiang, Mr He Ah Dong is a member of the Naxi minority. He unofficially started woodcarving at school, where the blade from his pencil sharpener was used to “enhance” his desk. On leaving School in 1995 he started as a designer at the Lijiang Beer Factory, a post he held until establishing his own art studio in 1999.

“A Dong Wood Carving” studio in Lijiang Old Town has grown in reputation, and after being invited to the University of Washington for a cultural exchange and exhibition in July 2003, his work is now collected in America.

In 2004, the government of Lijiang honored Ah Dong by giving his work “Die for Love” to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization as a gift.



1

1. CONDITION 2 — Wood carving, 67x110cm, 2012
2. DIE FOR LOVE 2 — Wood carving, 45cm, 2010
3. CONDITION 4 — Wood carving, 67x110cm, 2012
4. PLOUGH — Wood carving, 67x120cm, 2012



2



3



4



Born in 1955, the Naxi group, Pinzheng He served in the Naxi Dongba institute of culture. He researched on Dongba culture and engaged in modern Dongba painting. He achieved success in the aspect of inheriting and innovating the traditional Naxi art, and also published the work "Dongba Art".

In 1991, he established with friends the institute of Modern Dongba ink and painting. During this time, He produced hundreds of works, and published two albums of paintings.

He was invited to University of Washington and University of Whitman for cultural exchange and exhibition in 2003. In 2009, he held exhibitions in Qingzhou, South Korea. A great many of his works have been collected at home and abroad.



1. DONGBA HIEROGLYPHS 2 — 60x60cm, 2012
2. THE BROTHERS — 68x68cm, 2011
3. THE GOATHERD — 65x65cm, 2012
4. THE SILENT LAKE — 65x65cm, 2009
5. SINGING AND DANCING IN SPRING
6. FISHING — 68x68cm, 2008
7. FISHERMAN



2



3



4



5



6



7



Born in January, 1969, the Naxi group, Zhenjin Zhao is the chairman of the Lijiang institute of carving and painting, and the standing director of the Lijiang and Naxi institute of culture. He was taught to carve by his grandfather when only 12 years old and by the age of 19 was creating his own large wood carvings in the Naxi tradition.

In 1989, Zhao set up the first artists shop in Lijiang Old Town, working in partnership through to 2005 when he established his own studio. Since 2008 he has relocated to Black Dragon Park, where he continues to work. His images are based closely on the Dongba culture and include key pieces such as Human and Nature and Picture of Favonian Four Seasons.



1



2

1. THE GOLDEN ROOSTER AND CHRYSANTHEMUM (AUTUMN) — Wood Carving, 26x60cm, 2012

2. THE ROOSTER AND BAMBOO (SPRING) — Wood Carving, 26x60cm, 2012

3. THE EGRET PICKING LOTUS (SUMMER) — Wood Carving, 26x60cm, 2012

4. PIED MAGPIE VYING FOR PLUM BLOSSOM (WINTER) — Wood Carving, 26x60cm, 2012



3



4



Born in August, 1980, in Lijiang, the Naxi group, Deyuan Yang graduated from junior school in 1996. He learned carving and painting from his teacher in The Red Gallery in The Old Town.

From 2006 to 2008, he ran his own shop in The Old Town, since when he has continued to produce carvings and paintings based on life in Lijiang.



1

1. UNTITLED — Wood carving, 49x30cm, 2012
2. FISHES 1 — Wood carving, 50x36cm, 2012
3. FISHES 2 — Wood carving, 60x45cm, 2012
4. FISHES 3 — Wood carving, 60x45cm, 2012
5. FISHES 4 — Wood carving, 60x45cm, 2012



2



3



4



5



Zhang Xu, President of the Beijing Association of Dongba Culture and Arts. In 1990 she began several investigations in the Lijiang area, interviewed Dongba priests and documented various religious ceremonies. She produced several nationally and internationally acclaimed documentaries. Her research interest is focused on the philosophical aspects of Dongba religion. She has given lectures at Beijing University, Qinghua University and other cultural societies on Dongba culture, and held exhibitions of contemporary Dongba paintings in China and Germany.



1



2

1. NATURE WORSHIP — Acrylic mix gouache on Gaoli paper, 50x50cm, 1998
2. FORGOTTEN KINGDOM — Acrylic mix gouache on Gaoli paper, 51x62cm, 1993
3. THE RELATIONSHIP OF LIVES — Acrylic mix gouache on Gaoli paper, 51x90cm, 1991
4. THE THIRD KINGDOM OF YULONG MOUNTAIN — 29x66cm, 1997
5. PARADISE IN HOLY MOUNT — 42x100cm, 2010





Born on October 12, 1957, in Taiwan, Yong Yu travelled to Canada in 1997 before settling in China the year after.

From an early age he had a love of three dimensional forms, and learnt stone carving from a number of masters. On arriving in Lijiang, Yu was stimulated by its culture and natural resources. He established Green Snow Hall Tea room and Art studio and The Private Museum of Green Snow Hall Folk Antiques. Since 2004 he has designed a number of works, taking river weathered wood and stones from the head waters of the Yangtze, and incorporating them into allegorical pieces.



THE SCALE — Stone, Satin Walnut Wood / 2006



Student responses





A M Y W A L D M A N

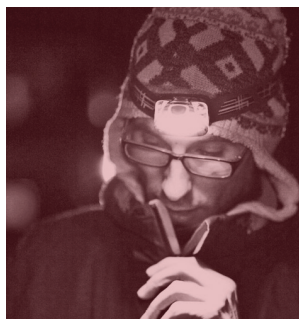
Before we left for China I anticipated that my work would be centred on ancient cave paintings found in the region. I had planned to try and decode these drawings, intuitively relate artist to artist. I wanted to deconstruct the process, consider the surrounding environment, their purpose and what had been used to create them. I intended to work from these paintings, creating new pieces of work inspired by the surviving pictures. However, once I'd actually seen the paintings and started to copy the marks that had been left over the years, my plan changed. After studying these fragmented marks it was obvious they were part of a much larger, complex, image. It seemed that these had once been confident gestural marks and felt it an injustice to draw the disjointed marks that had survived, but instead, attempt to envision the complete drawing that was once there and the story it had been telling.

There were definitely marks that were still fairly visible that made up parts of animals. However upon hearing group members offer up their own thoughts and theories as to why these drawings were there, and what they represented, was most fascinating. Although we only had disjointed clues to go by, it was exciting to see what others made of them and this triggered many different ideas. Although

we can only speculate, we came to the conclusion that these paintings probably did have some purpose other than decoration. However, what we will never know is if they were simply stories detailing Palaeolithic way of life? Were they boasting about a hunt, warnings of surrounding animals, representing something symbolic or even a map of the area? Was there reasoning behind the overlapping of lines or were they simply there because they had not yet found away to erase the last?

As well as the cave paintings, I was very interested in working from the surrounding sites and the people and places we visited. There were colours and patterns everywhere in China, ranging from the brightly coloured robes in Naxi ceremonies to the engraved roof tiles on houses. I took inspiration from the linear workings evident in the cave paintings. I used different materials to experiment with the use of line, mono printing with inks, drawing ink, charcoal pen and pencil. I also used natural material sourced from the surrounding environment, such as soil and twigs. I tried to keep every drawing to less than ten minutes to keep the lines simple and confident. These methods were used in homage to the ancient artists. ●





A N D R A S S C H E I N - I L L É S

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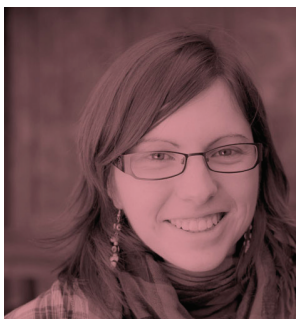
I felt very privileged to be able to have the opportunity to encounter and study cave paintings, something that very few people have the opportunity to do. The fact that I was able to do it whilst engaging with a vastly different culture, at the same time, made this journey a truly life changing experience. I saw this field trip as a chance to allow new impulses and experiences to direct the stream of my ideas. My choice to use cameras instead of painting materials to record my response seemed to pay off on the end. With the freedom of not having to paint, a very time consuming process, I could engage with the individuals of our group and the people who we met out there and the environment more directly. This has led to experiences that have a deeper and certainly a positive effect on my creative practice and research.

There were countless highlights during the two weeks that we spent in China and they all strengthened, what I felt is, a different sensibility towards the environment. I saw a very close connection between the people of Lijiang and their surrounding land and this link could be observed on almost all aspects of life. Their respect towards the Jade Dragon snow mountain, the fresh and sometimes raw food they were eating, the attention to

their gardens and surrounding living areas are just a few to mention. They certainly maintained a harmonic relationship with nature, which is rare to see in our western society. The creators of the cave paintings and the present day artists who we met were not any different. The ancient drive to gather, process and apply pigment to the rock surface happened in a symbiosis with the environment, and the closeness of nature could be observed by looking at the practice and habits of the Lijiang artists. Experiencing this helped me to gain a deeper understanding of the Dongba culture and engage with their pictographic language on a greater level.

Working on this research project shifted my artistic interests towards digital media, especially time-lapse filmmaking in a fine art context. Using time-lapse heightens ones awareness of the passage of time, which is appropriate to this project. This new direction in my work has opened up a great deal of new territories for my creative practice, which never happened to this extent before. For this reason alone it has been a very valuable project and I'm looking forward to continue my research in this area, both academically and geographically. ●





HANNAH FOAD

Yunnan Province is the most ethnically diverse area of China, containing half of the country's ethnic minorities, including the Naxi.

The Tiger Leaping Gorge area gave birth to the culture of Lijiang, where caves formed natural homes for the people. The protected area is home to 6,000 species of plant, 173 species of mammal, and 417 species of bird. The Jinsha River has few flat areas, vegetation is sparse, a range of animals live in the valleys and mountains, and plants are collected by the local people for medicinal purposes.

Rock art has been discovered throughout China with at least 10,000 known images, most of them found out in the open on boulders and on shelters. Cave paintings themselves are rare. About 55 rock art sites have been found in the Jinsha River region. The rock art here lacks any resemblance to any other Chinese site or elsewhere in East Asia, and also differs greatly to sites in India, Siberia and Russia. However, if these had been discovered in Europe they would be classified as Magdalenian (the rock art of France and Spain), and comparable to the hunter-gatherer art of South Africa. The use of profile and outlining is also similar to rock art found in northern Australia. Other similarities to Magdalenian and hunter-gatherer is the depiction of animal heads. Deer with upturned noses have been found at the Jinsha River and Magdalenian sites, depicting the natural behaviour of deer to sniff the air.

The Jinsha paintings are younger than late European Magdalenian but the earliest are older than any surviving Chinese rock art. Some believe these similarities are due to a once widespread outline tradition, but there seems to be no specific time frame for this. A more popular theory is that the paintings arose in situ without a direct connection or influence to other places, which given the similarities is fascinating from an art history perspective.

Of the 55 found sites, 3 have consisted of engravings in open areas and appear to be more recent than much of the pigment art and related to other engraving traditions throughout China.

Among the painted images have been riders on horseback, human hands, geometric patterns and wild animals. The most common subject matters are deer, wild goat, bison, wild cattle, horses and human-like forms.

Animals have been found in various poses from profiles to running, standing, climbing and jumping. The rock art is made up of four colours; red, orange, brown and dark purple, and many of the images are overlapping and some are so faint that digital enhancement is required.

Various researchers have discussed the idea of the rock art being a precursor of the Dongba pictorial script. The link is the use of outline images, and the frequent use of animal heads. The role of the paintings in the creation of the script is a reminder of their role to tell stories and convey ritual information. Dongba has developed in context with other writing styles, and doesn't predate 1703.

Huajizhu was the first recorded site. It contains at least 23 paintings, many of them unidentifiable. The original floor has collapsed leaving some of the paintings now up to 8m of the current ground level.

Baiyunwan had fifteen identifiable paintings:

- 3 large red outline stag heads
- 3 red outline deer heads
- a dark red partial outline deer
- a red outline bison pierced by arrows
- a dark red outline deer
- a red outline male goat
- a red outline horse with lines for hair on its back
- a purple-red outline male goat head
- a red outline bull with solid infill horns
- a small red outline deer, partly under the bull

Due to the low levels of uranium present it is difficult to date the images. The Jinsha River outline paintings are very natural in the range of poses in which the creatures appear. This capture of the animals' essential characteristics with a single outline would have demanded great artistic concentration. ●





J O H N S U N D E R L A N D

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I have much experience of travel in Asia, so much so that I would call myself an Asiaphile. So I knew what to expect in some respects. I had also been to Beijing, briefly in the past. But it is clear to me that this visit certainly went well beyond my expectations, in a good way.

I found the opportunity to study so many aspects of Naxi culture, to experience the environment of the foothills of the Himalayas and to be able to encounter, experience and analyse cave paintings immensely stimulating as an artist, researcher and as an archaeologist. The project opened up at least two major themes that could be followed up in the future with the potential of making a substantial contribution to my doctoral research. I also managed to complete artworks that opened new directions both theoretically and practically, using photography in new ways, inspired particularly by the cave paintings themselves. I also developed my practice by using moving images and making short films and time lapse pieces.

Working in a group so intensely was a relatively new experience for me, particularly a group of artists, (as opposed to archaeologists). I was able to find a role for myself, enjoyed and benefited from interactions with others from different disciplines with a variety of approaches. I see the potential for collaborative work as one that has opened up as a result of this project. One that has led directly to further collaboration with some of the members of the group as part of my doctoral research.

Learning not to look into the camera was relatively easy, being one of the subjects of ,or participants in, a documentary was interesting, if at times a bit odd. This appeared to be a collaborative process too. Allowing cameras to be intimate was interesting, something like performance, but at the same time quite a natural experience once I was used to being filmed.

Watching other photographers practising was a curious experience, like looking at myself from the outside at times. (I usually practice alone). This has made me contemplate how photographers, including myself, operate in society on many levels, particularly ethically. More generally I have become interested in what affects the proliferation of photography and film making that the greater availability of photographic technologies has on contemporary cultures.

The level of engagement with local artists and academics was one of the best aspects of this project, opening up possibilities and friendships that will be enhanced when we work together in the future on the touring exhibition and further collaborative research. I am tempted to learn mandarin in order to communicate better and will be looking into this.

This project has certainly made a large contribution to my learning experience, I came away with a great deal of motivation that has been maintained ever since. It has opened up new avenues and I will remember this till the end of my days. ●





KARLA ALEXANDRA

Take a journey to a place where the bubble of sky is as blue as the view from your window seat above the clouds; a place where painted labyrinths of memories are preserved in ancient mountain trails and thundering gorges; a place that is a sanctuary made of glass, where the old world meets the new, where history and culture coexist, yet drip fragility.

Lijiang.

Hidden within the vibrant cloak-folds of consumerism and superficiality, you will find a woven tapestry of spirituality, a community of people sewn together by ageless beliefs, a culture where man and the natural world reside together in harmony, and where language is transformed into a seamless marriage of spoken word and pictures.

The outer edges of Lijiang will provide you with the evidence as to why adhering to traditional values is a more fulfilling way of life. This is a place where a matriarchal society is still welcomed, where the small farming communities have all they need and upon observation, want for nothing more. Running through the veins of the steadfast Naxi people is an innate culture of mutual respect for others, animals and nature, passed down to them in the blood-work of their ancestors. Even in a modern world, their customs are continuously immortalised in various art forms, which incorporate not only their heritage and language but natural surroundings.

Lijiang breathes colourful creativity and life into a significant part of China's history, and I for one, hope that my contribution will act as a small stepping stone along the way to its successful preservation, recognition and appreciation. ●

Goddess

Her face points upward,
snow-covered precipice,
a wing of light
against the city's blackened cheek.

Embark upon the ancient spice trails
of her breath,
follow the Li River
and set sail to Elephant Mountain,

a frozen emerald
shivering in the lemon sunset,
like the ripples in rock-pools
at her feet.

Step free from dream's edge
and pull down the sky,
heaven's curtain
where

*'rice grows and the land is invisible,
by the pomegranate water,
in the clear air
over Li Chiang'.*



T O M G E O R G E

35

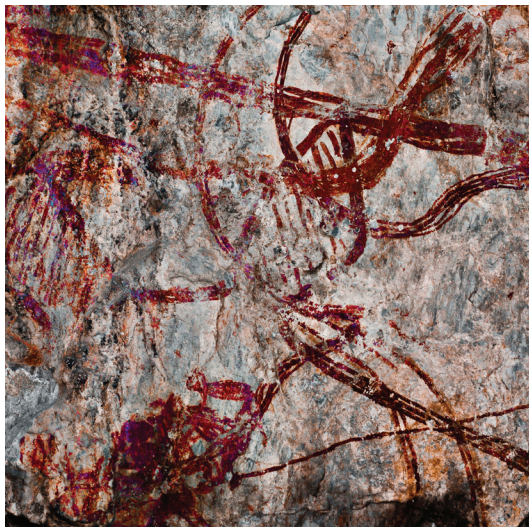
Trips like this to China constantly alter my perception of the world around me. After traveling extensively in Southern Africa, Europe and briefly in Northern Africa, my perceptions of peoples' relationships both to one another, the earth around them and political structure was very open.

Anthropology has been an interest of mine for some time and has driven my photographic documentation. I often feel that the people of a land express its diversity from the rest of the world; often more so than the land itself. The difference in not only physical looks but also beliefs, family structures and attitudes to work. These factors alter so dramatically from continent to continent, country to country and village to village. This diversity was highlighted on the recent trip to China. There were vast differences between the way people live, both enforced due to income or geographic location, as well as the differences of choice. This was noted both between Hong Kong and Lijiang, and central Lijiang and the surrounding villages which often felt more like an ancient world than the 21st century.

The ability to visit these foreign lands with relative ease is a 20th century phenomenon. Areas such as Lijiang still receive very little western tourism, with the vast majority of visitors coming from within China. This commercial engine threatens to extinguish traditional Naxi life and transform this long established way of life into a distorted Disneyland attraction. This inherent need to raise incomes seems to have tainted the true nature of the region, by for example,

producing a pastiche of a traditional building for the sake of tourism.

I had a surprising engagement with the Dongba language. Though I have always had an underlying interest in language my dyslexic mind has always hindered me in learning any more than the bare basics. The pictographic nature of the Dongba text instantly engaged with me and not only allowed me to get past the basics but excited me. Being one of the few pictorial languages left in existence, its future is less than guaranteed unless it can inspire future interest and evolve with the times. If this language it still to have a place in society outside of museums and galleries it may have to take step back from its traditional roots of religion, and storytelling. ●





Z O E P L U M M E R

I was privileged to be selected as part of a research team that visited the Naxi people of Lijiang, in South West China.

The research trip which took place in October 2012 focused on the documentation of cave paintings discovered in Lijiang. We were attempting to establish if there was a connection between the cave paintings and the Naxi pictographic language.

There were also underpinning questions of how we, a team of artists could contribute toward the preservation of the Naxi's Dongba culture?

I am a postgraduate photography student of The University of Northampton, and my designated research topic prior to the study trip was on the Roosevelt's family fascination with the Naxi's Dongba culture.

This rare pictorial language has had recognition from three generations of the Roosevelt family. Quentin Roosevelt II, grandson of President Roosevelt had written his senior Harvard thesis discussing the Naxi Dongba pictographic as an art form in the 1940's. Quentin II published articles in *Life* magazine and collected a significant archive of Naxi Dongba artefacts which mainly reside at the Library of congress.

Another important figure consumed my attention, Joseph Rock. Rock dedicated over 22 years of his life to living in the Yunnan

Province of China, translating over 1000 Dongba pictographs into English.

In researching Joseph Rock, we discovered there had been a Naxi exhibition in New York at the Rubin Museum. Connections developed with academics in Australia and America with persons who had dedicated years of their life to the study of the Naxi. Through this shared passion collaborations of valuable knowledge took place further expanding our understanding to this unique and fascinating minority people.

As an artist working with a team of talented and skilled practitioners creating works to keep the pictograph alive has been an honour and a privilege. My own practise has now shifted toward the understanding of language and how to incorporate this in my making processes. The cultural engagement of Naxi has influenced my personal life and evoked a recognition of respect, the true meaning of hard work and the importance of family. This experience has been life changing both professionally and personally.

I am proud to be part of a growing team focused on investing resources to the Naxi's Dongba Culture, the new Visual Language and Semiotics research centre opening at The University of Northampton and UK touring exhibition of works by Naxi artists. Who could not be interested in one of the world's only living picture languages?





DR. BAI, GENG SHENG

The culture of the Naxi people of south west China was virtually unknown in Britain until the end of the 19th century when nearly one thousand ancient Naxi Dongba scripts were acquired by the British Museum. The sudden awareness of this ancient exotic culture with its Dongba religion attracted a group of scholars, such as Anthony Jackson, whose publication, *Naxi Religion*, documented the Dongba religious practices and beliefs of the Naxi people. The British Museum continues to assist researchers around the world who have an interest in exploring the enigmatic content of these religious texts, that use a unique pictograph-based language that remains in use to the current day.

Thanks to a collaboration between the Communication University of China, The University of Northampton and the Lijiang Digital Media Centre for Naxi Dongba Culture, an exhibition of artworks providing a contemporary interpretation of Naxi Dongba culture is arriving in the UK. It is hoped that this show will facilitate the communication of Naxi Dongba ideas to a western audience, with each venue promoting a degree of mutual understanding and cooperation between the two cultures. I believe that the old tradition of the Naxi Dongba culture with its mystery and unique written and visual presentation will provide our friends in the west with a source of affection, passion, inspiration, love and dignity.

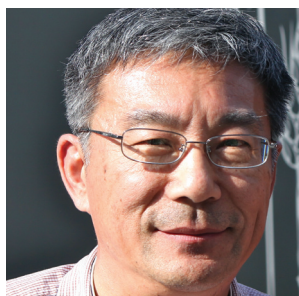
My dear friends, it is our responsibility to protect the diversity of human cultures and secure the happiness that those cultures bring to mankind.



MR. GUO

The exhibition of artworks derived from the Naxi Dongba culture which is visiting Britain is a new stage in the cultural exchange between Britain and China. Lijiang Old Town is a World Heritage Site, and the soul of the town is the Dongba culture that has an historical and ongoing importance to the lives of the Naxi people. This exhibition will showcase the best works of contemporary Dongba Artists and will be an important window for the understanding of Dongba culture.

Thank you very much, The University of Northampton and Communication University of China! Thank you for the great endeavor you've made in enabling this exhibition to happen. I believe this exhibition will be a great opportunity for both Lijiang and Northampton to strengthen our friendship and cooperation.



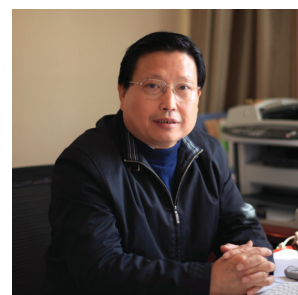
JUNQI YAN

I am lucky to have known kindred spirits such as Nick P, Paul M, Graham N, Frazer S, Robert P, Jinzhou R, Gengsheng B, Fulong Z and others, who feel the same as I do, and together, we have made OUR dream come true.

The opening of the exhibition of Naxi Dongba artworks is the result of our endeavors, and finally brings examples of the Naxi Dongba culture to a Western Audience. What a relief!

I'm still in a dream, though now my dreams are of an exhibition that draws the attention of the world to the Naxi minority and the Dongba culture they have carried for centuries. I dream that the exhibition will act as a catalyst for the preservation of minority cultures across the world. After all, the many cultures of the world act as a repository for the collective wisdom of mankind.

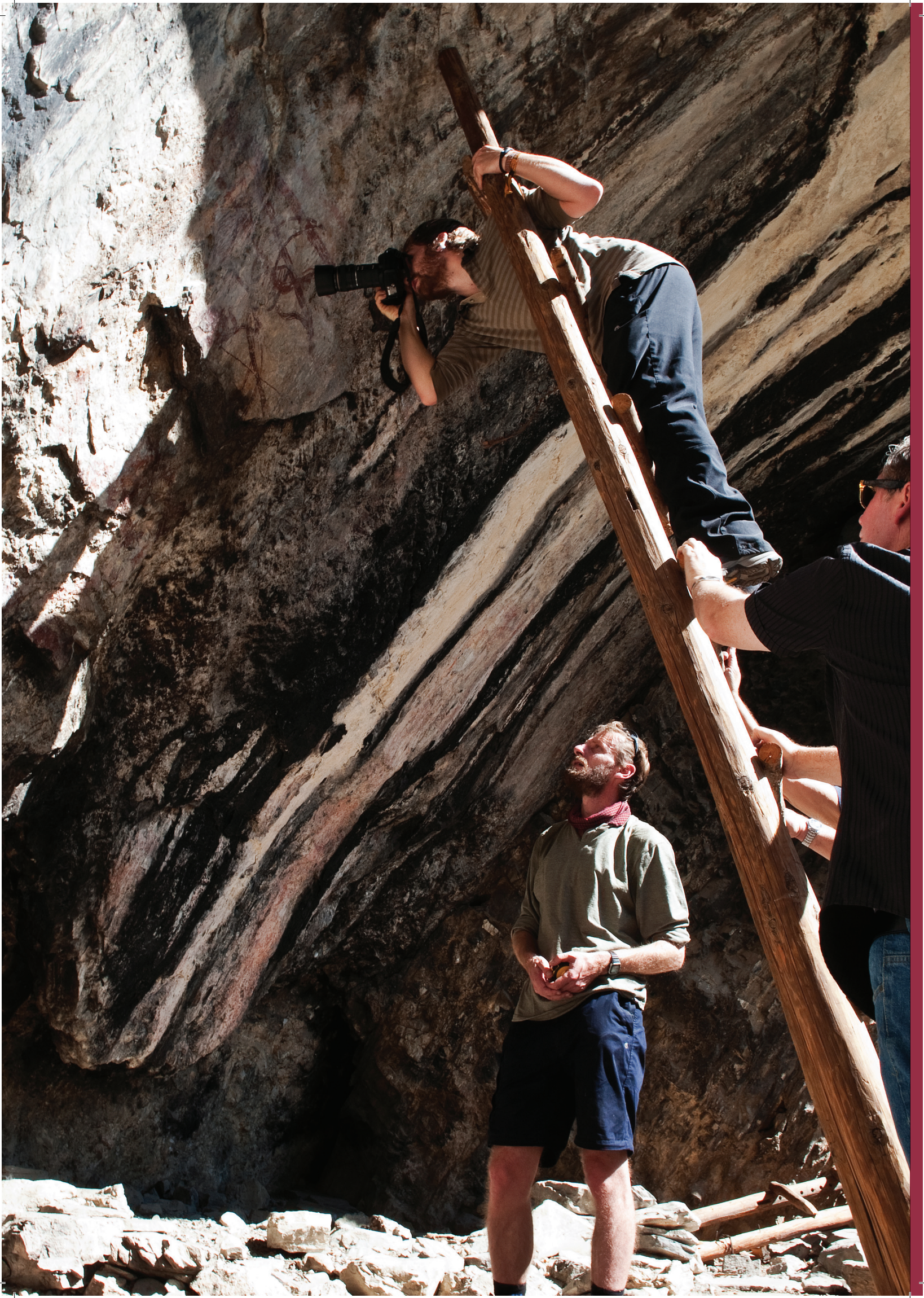
From the moment I saw the wonderful artworks created in Lijiang, tucked away in a remote southwest corner of China, I began to dream of how I might enable them to be seen across the world.

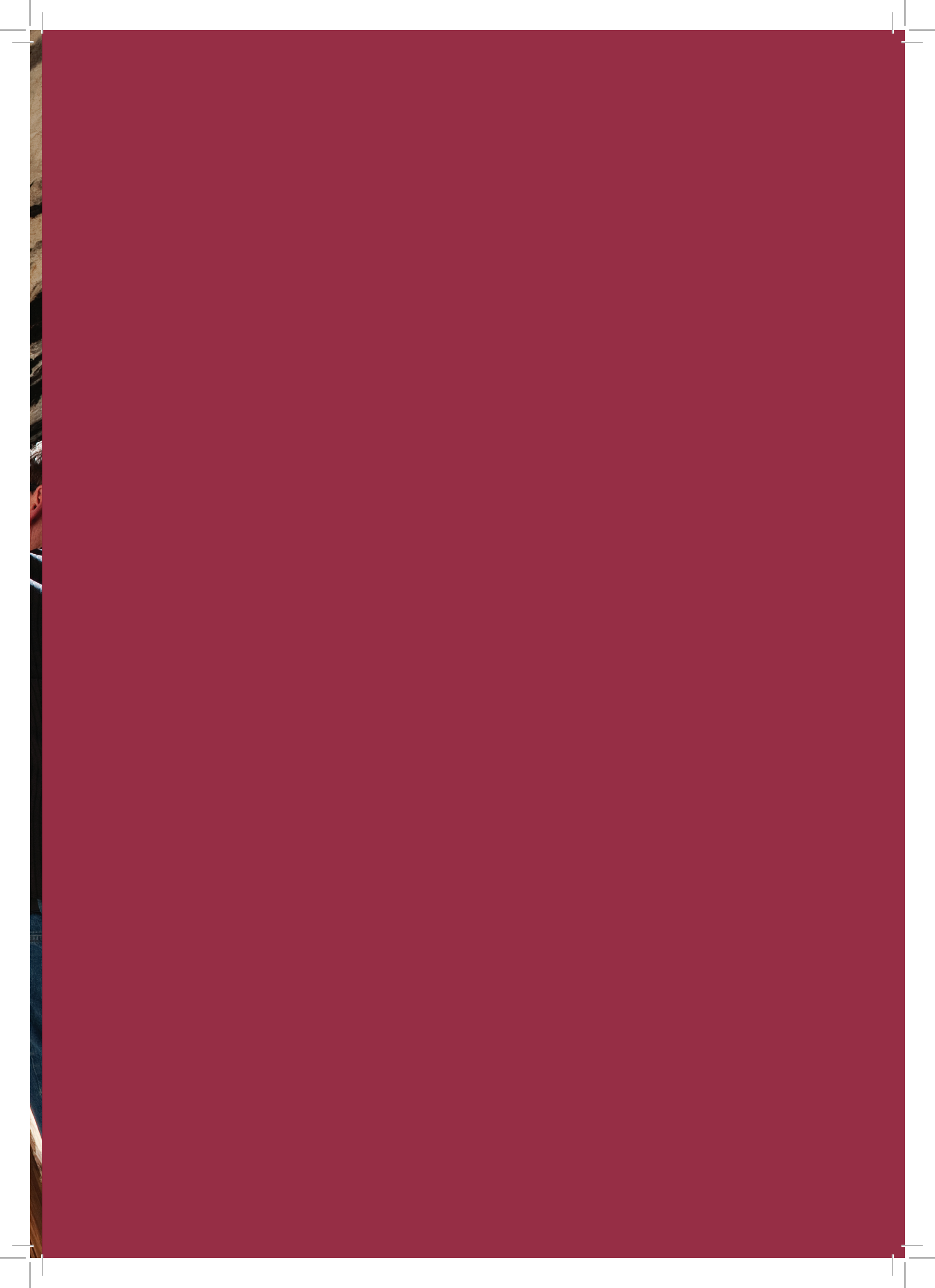


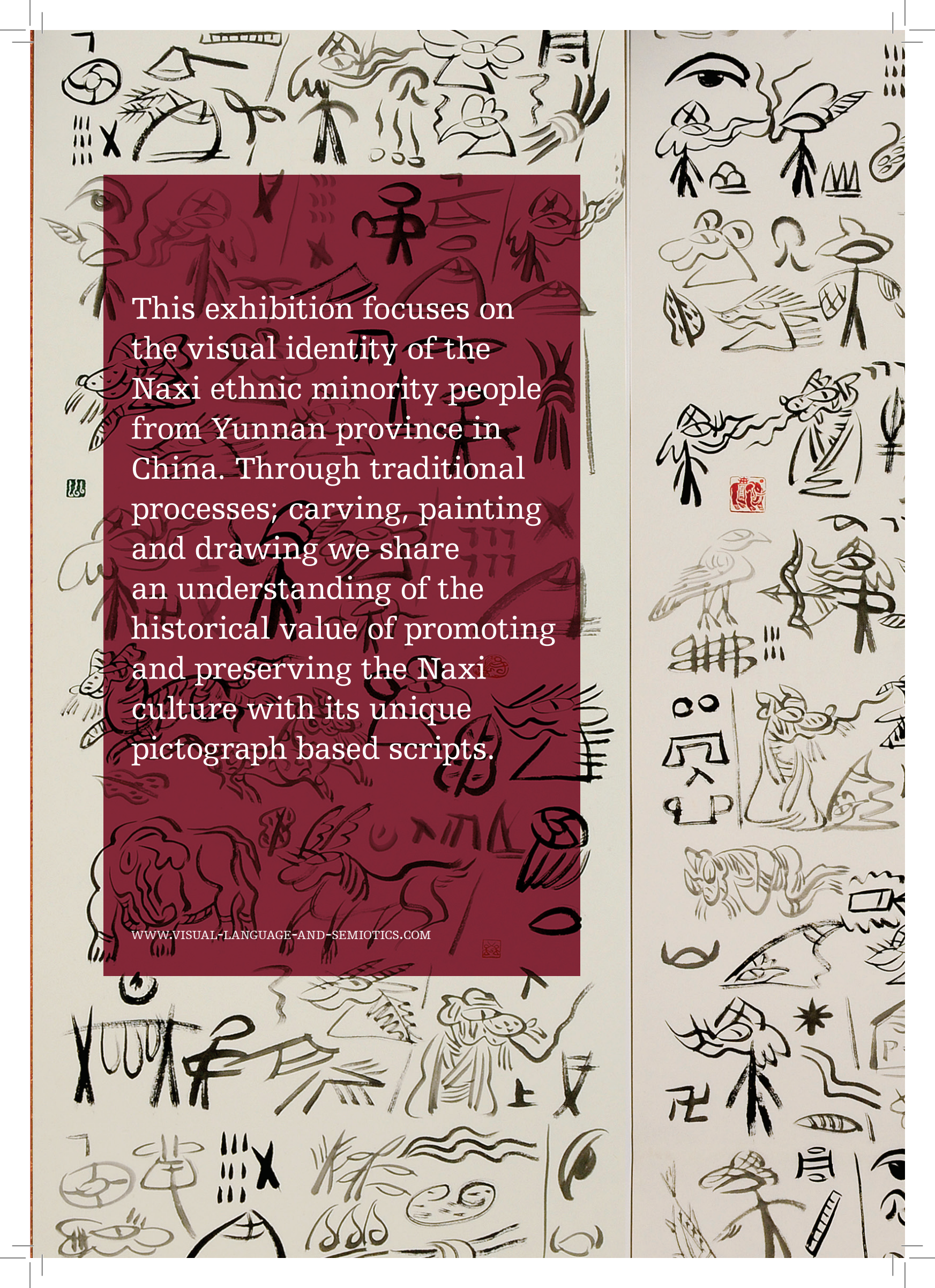
DR. REN, JIN ZHOU

As one of the promoters, I warmly congratulate the opening of the exhibition of Naxi Dongba artworks at The University of Northampton set in the beautiful surrounding countryside of Northamptonshire. I deeply believe that this exhibition and related activities will stimulate the imagination of artists and scientists, and that it will tie the research collaboration between our two institutions in the academic fields of visual art and creative culture.

The Naxi Dongba art works will literally be facing the UK audience. The visual impact will be extraordinary since the culture contained therein can be traced back for 7000 years. I hope that in unveiling the "forgotten" ancient culture we will bring a richness of experience to a new audience.





The background of the entire image is a dense, repeating pattern of Naxi pictographs. These symbols are drawn in a simple, expressive black ink style on a light beige background. They represent various elements of Naxi culture, including human figures in traditional dress, animals like horses and birds, and abstract geometric shapes. A central vertical band is overlaid with a solid dark red color, providing a contrasting background for the white text.

This exhibition focuses on the visual identity of the Naxi ethnic minority people from Yunnan province in China. Through traditional processes; carving, painting and drawing we share an understanding of the historical value of promoting and preserving the Naxi culture with its unique pictograph based scripts.

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