



# Welcome

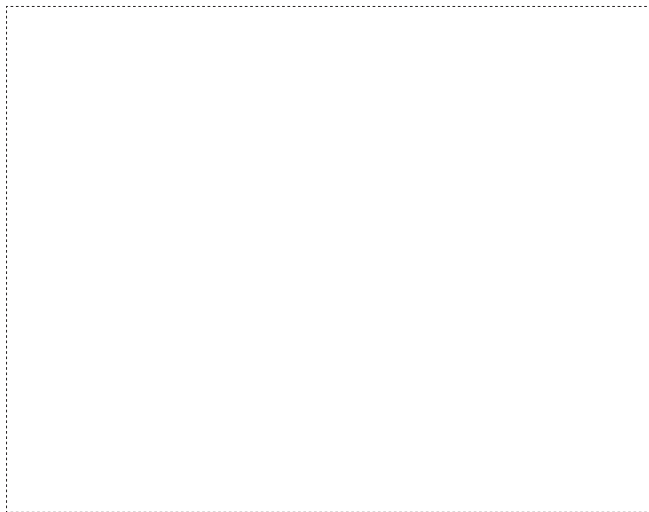
to Asia Society Hong Kong Center!

## ✓ CHECK THIS OUT!

Our Center was once an Explosives Magazine Compound built by the British Army in the mid 19th century. Join our site tours if you want to hear more of our story.



**DRAW** your first impression of the site or an element that is memorable for you.




**WRITE** down what you know about Asia Society Hong Kong Center!  
Who are we and what do we do?

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## FIND THIS!

 8.5 → 31.8.2014 +

I was looking at a sign with Metamorphosis: Xu Bing will be at

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the Asia Society Hong Kong Center between May 17<sup>th</sup> and August 31<sup>st</sup>, 2014. So I went.

  →  →  →  → .

I walked up to the gallery and found there were lots of people at the reception.

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There were many different types of works by Xu Bing's ones.

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painting, matches, and a book.

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As I was looking at this and that, I thought to myself, this is excellent.

## Our current exhibition is *It Begins with Metamorphosis: Xu Bing*



**GUESS** what the exhibition is about?

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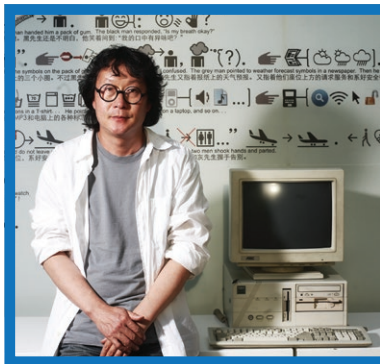
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## ✓ CHECK THIS OUT!

Xu Bing is a Chinese born artist who currently resides in Beijing and serves as the Vice President of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing (CAFA). Many of his works explore issues of communication and language, the power of the written word and the role it plays in our lives.



**THINK** about the title (and theme) of this exhibition. What kinds of work do you think you will see?

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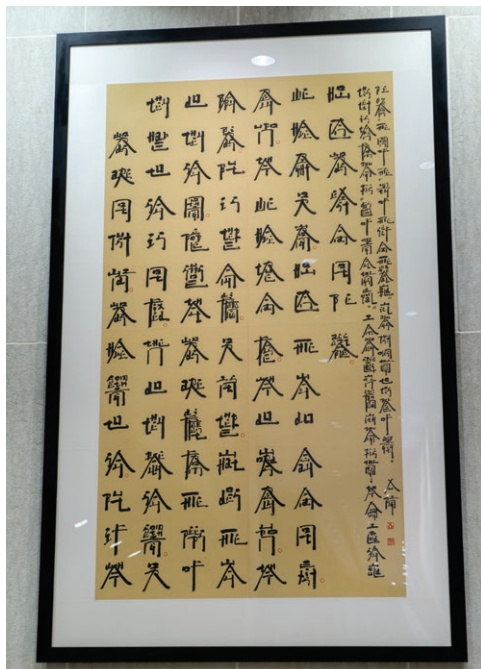
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## 🔍 FIND *Square Word Calligraphy*



✓ **SELECT** a “character” from the work and try to DECODE what it means.

*Square Word Calligraphy*, 2014.  
Ink on paper, H290 x W178 cm.

✍️ **WRITE** down some of the most memorable elements for you about this work.

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### ✓ CHECK THIS OUT!

*Square Word Calligraphy* is a special way of writing designed by Xu Bing. It appears to be Chinese characters, but actually it is a system for arranging English alphabets. He combined Chinese calligraphy and English lettering by organizing the 26 alphabets into structures that resemble Chinese characters.



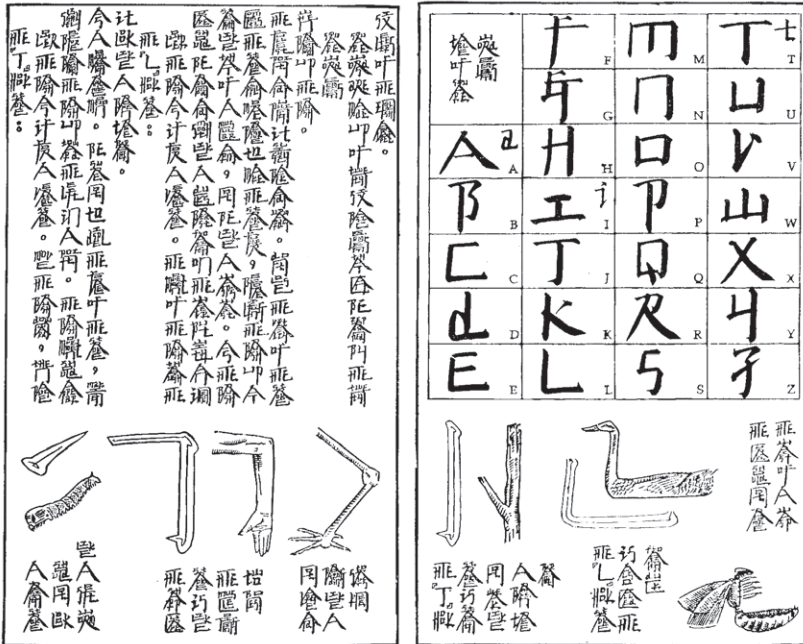
**IMAGINE** you only speak English, what would you see? If you only speak Chinese, what would you see?



**HEAR** what the artist says:

*“The interesting aspect of this work lies in its ability to transform people’s restrictive way of thinking. This is a kind of liberation and it is the liberation of the mind.”*

60



Text pages from *An Introduction to Square Word Calligraphy* (1994-1996), wood block hand-printed book and ink rubbing with wood cover; water-based ink on grass paper, 39x23x2.7cm. Photo Courtesy of Xu Bing Studio.



*Square Word Calligraphy Classroom, 1994-1996*, Classroom installation with instructional video, model books (*An Introduction to Square Word Calligraphy*), copybooks, ink, brushes, brush stands, blackboard, framed student work. Installation view from Xu Bing in Berlin, Museum für Ostasiatische Kunst, Berlin (now Museum für Asiatische Kunst), Germany, 2004. Photo Courtesy of Xu Bing Studio.

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## **FIND** *The Character of Characters*




*The Character of Characters*, 2012. Animated film installation, 16 minutes 45 sec.  
Commissioned by the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco for the 2012 exhibition  
“Out of Character: Decoding Chinese Calligraphy” with support from  
The Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation.

Xu Bing believes the Chinese character “一” (meaning “one” or a stroke in Chinese calligraphy) is the beginning of all things.

 **DRAW** the shape, symbol or character that represents the beginning of all things for you. Why did you choose this shape, symbol or character?

### **CHECK THIS OUT!**

In *The Character of Characters*, Xu Bing explores the origins of writing and the connection between Chinese calligraphy, the role of replication in art and society, and the impacts they have on our lives.

 **DESCRIBE** what you can see in the animation in one minute to a friend. What message(s) do you think the artist is trying to get across? What elements or segments in the animation make you say that?


## ✓ CHECK THIS OUT!

The animation is based on a famous painting known as *Autumn Colors on the Qiao and Hua Mountains* by 13th century artist Zhao Mengfu. In *The Character of Characters*, Xu Bing brings this painting into an animated land where traditional objects and modern icons meet.



*Autumn Colors on the Qiao and Hua Mountains*, Zhao Mengfu (1254-1322), Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368). Handscroll, ink and color on paper, 28.4 x 90.2 cm. Collection of National Palace Museum.

🎧 **HEAR** what the artist says:

*“This animation attempts to express the inner core and strength of the Chinese culture, and its role in the establishment of the new human civilization of the future.”* 

Which format do you like better: animation or the traditional handscroll?  
Why? 🖋️ **WRITE** it down!

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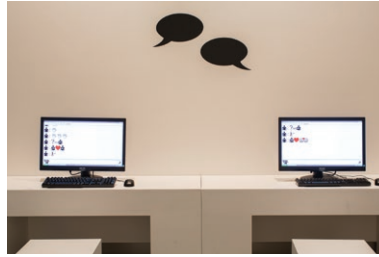
 **FIND** *Book From the Ground*





*Book from the Ground*, 2014. Mixed media, dimensions variable.

 **DRAW** two or three common symbols or icons you like.  
What do they say? Why do you like them?

**✓ CHECK THIS OUT!**  
This is Xu Bing’s journey in search of a “language” that can be read and understood by everyone, regardless of our race, background or gender. He is also showing how art should, and can be made accessible to all.




*Book from the Ground*, 2014. Mixed Media, dimensions variable. Image: detail.

  **WRITE / DRAW** about your experience in the gallery today in Xu Bing's icon language. What would you say? If time permits, match it with what comes up on the terminal when you type in the same message.

A large, empty rectangular area enclosed by a dashed border, intended for the viewer to write or draw their response.

## ✓ CHECK THIS OUT!

In *Book From the Ground*, Xu Bing explores the idea of using icons not just to explain something, but actually connecting them together to tell a story.

 **HEAR** what the artist says:

*“Regardless of your cultural background or mother tongue, you should be able to read this book as long as you have experience of the modern world. The educated and illiterate can equally enjoy the pleasures of reading.”* 66

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 **FIND** Background Story

 **DESCRIBE** what you are looking at. What kind of scenery is it? What is in the picture? What materials did the artist use?



*Background Story*, 2014. Natural debris, glass panel and lightbox, H395 x W150 x D60 cm.

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**✓ CHECK THIS OUT!**  
Xu Bing challenges your assumptions and shows you that everything is not always as it first seems. You will need to think hard about what you are seeing!



## ✓ CHECK THIS OUT!

The *Background Story* project at ASHK is based on Wang Jian's *Landscape in the Style of Xu Daoning* (1672). Wang is an artist from 17th century who followed the traditions of Northern Song landscape style of painting. This painting is part of a collection from the Hong Kong Museum of Art.

Wang Jian, *Landscape in the Style of Xu Daoning*, dated 1672. Vertical scroll, ink on paper, L127.5 x W55 cm. Collection of the Hong Kong Museum of Art, Leisure and Cultural Services Department.



**IMAGINE** if you are inside this painting.



**WRITE** a postcard to your friend about the environment you are in. What do you see? Is it daytime? Is it foggy? What is the air like?



**DRAW** the most memorable element you find in the environment.

Dear: \_\_\_\_\_

From: \_\_\_\_\_



**HEAR** what the artist says:

*“Through this creative process, I begin to understand, that although Chinese painting is based on imagery, it has a deeper relationship with nature.”* 66

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