

# SUPERPOSITION: Equilibrium & Engagement

**Chen Shaoxiong**

*The Views*, 2016 at Carriageworks

**21st Biennale**

**of Sydney**



*The Views*, 2016  
four-channel video installation  
2.5 x 3 m  
Installation view (2016) at the Power Station of Art, Shanghai  
Courtesy Pékin Fine Arts, Beijing. Collection of Luo Qingmin

This work is a lyrical and evocative representation of everyday scenes that move between sparse landscapes and urban and industrial images. By working in black-and-white ink drawing, and developing a rhythm of moving image on a large scale, the material of the work evokes feelings of memory and nostalgia, especially when we see almost empty landscapes, and scenes of winter. The images are evocative because they already work as cultural metaphors. This means we already understand them because there is a history of similar images having certain associations: for example, images of autumn and winter can imply old age and death. This is one of the last works the artist completed before his death in 2016.

At the same time, industrial and urban images might imply ideas of contemporary alienation and isolation, and the changing physical (and, by implication, social) landscape over time through urban development. By combining these kinds of images Chen is telling a story, perhaps a highly personal life story, even if we can't know the exact meaning of his references.



## Questions for Discussion

1. When making observational drawing, what do we put in and what do we leave out? What do we really see? How can we use drawing to evoke a feeling?
2. What is our understanding of a personal story and point of view, and how that makes up a part of a larger cultural time and place? How is the former an expression of, and comment on, the latter?
3. How does the visual language chosen by the artist contribute to the communication of meaning?
4. What difference does it make to put these images through digital processes? How does this affect the story?
5. Think about the 'views' that are important to you. As visual research, make some small sketches of what you remember of these views.

## Reference Points

When we look at Chen Shaoxiong's work, it is often a feeling that we respond with. While the scenes of his animation aren't necessarily familiar to us, we find images in our memory that might be similar, and as viewers we look for the story the artist is trying to tell us.

We might think about his work in relation to that of William Kentridge (who exhibited in the 1996 and 2008 editions of the Biennale of Sydney) or Qiu Anxiong (2008 Biennale of Sydney) and consider the political and social contexts each artist has worked in – are there similarities to be found in either their work, or their cultural context?

## Practices and Processes

Chen's work is an example of contemporary practice that combines analogue and digital techniques to tell a story. To make a body of work in response to his project, we might start with what we see in our daily lives – places we visit that are important to us, 'views' that we see every day. We can then put these starting points through different processes to develop a series of drawings, and, in turn, a short moving-image work. By varying our materials, and the content of our images in subtle ways, we can refine what we want our images to say.

### Drawing

Make two drawings of the same scene, one with key details left out. How does the difference change the feeling and meaning of your image? Try a similar project with black and white and then colour. How do we use colour to convey a mood?

### Experiment with ink drawing

Make a series of drawings based on everyday scenes – the view from a window, a walk down your local street, a photo from a holiday. Imagine the same view from a different angle. Try to work in a landscape (horizontal) format so you can think about how you might create an animation with drawing.

### Animation

Once you have some drawings and are happy with your images, set up a mobile phone or tablet to take pictures in a program like iMotion. Work in landscape format. Slowly build up your image one small mark at a time, and photograph each incremental change in your drawing. When you export your image sequence you will have a stop-motion animation moving-image work. Make sure you take plenty of photos, so that when it plays you have enough for 25 frames

per second. The more images you have, with very small changes, the smoother your animation will appear. Think about where to start and how to end your work.

**Subjective frame:**  
feeling, imagination,  
experience