

biennaleofsydney

Andrew Thomas Huang

The Beast of Jade Mountain: Queen Mother of the West (西王母),
2023-24

Polymer, steel, automotive paint

Courtesy of the artist

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Education Resource (7-12)



3D render of the sculpture by Andrew Thomas Huang



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Overview

In ancient Chinese myth, five tigers hold the balance of cosmic forces, embody the power of sun and fire, adorn the armour of the empire's most brutal generals, fill the nightmares of children and guard the skies of the west. As a Chinese zodiac sign, the tiger symbolises nobility and fearlessness, existing in the space between the divine, the animal and the human. Innately fluid, they move through history and mythology as spirit, force of nature, creature and warrior all at once. For American Chinese artist Andrew Thomas Huang, who understands queerness as the transgression of boundaries, the tiger is a symbol of liberation.

A film director by trade, Huang's career to date combines live action and visual effects to create characters that straddle multiple worlds and which he refers to as 'queer morphologies'. Each avatar complicates not only the boundaries between male and female, but between the human and the non-human, the real and the imagined.

Here Xiwangmu (西王母), Queen Mother of the West in Chinese mythology and archetype of the ancient divine feminine, is neither goddess, monster or myth, but tiger. Crowned with her messenger birds, qingniao (青鳥), she dons the compassionate face of a bodhisattva, masking the beast within.

As the saying goes, the lion may be the ruler of the jungle, the dragon of rivers and seas, but the tiger is lord of beasts – of the wild, untamable and immutable. Presented on a massive scale in Huang's first-ever sculptural work, the tiger goddess is a maker of worlds, her immense eyes wide open to watch the sun rise over the centuries.



3D render of the sculpture by Andrew Thomas Huang



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Discussion Questions

Huang's work is heavily influenced by his Chinese-American heritage, often drawing on myths and aesthetics from Chinese culture and history.

How can our **heritage** inform and enrich the content and style of our work? What should we consider when working with **cultural material**? How might that be different when working with materials from a **culture that is not our own**? What can **myths** and **history** tell us about the **present day**?

Sculpture is not the typical medium for Huang. His primary medium is film making and animation. The creation of this work therefore posed significant challenges.

What are some of the considerations artists face when switching from **one medium to another**? What skills are **transferrable** across mediums? What are some of the **challenges** that may have arisen during the **design** and **construction** of this work specifically? How do you think they were **resolved**?

Practical Activities

Think of a figure or character from mythology that resonates with you. Using clay create a bust in their likeness. Pay attention to specific details. Create clothing and adornments that convey a sense of power and status.

Imagine you are commissioned to make a sculpture on a grand scale (e.g. 4 x 4 x 4 metres) that references ancient mythology.

In groups of three come up with a pitch for the subject of your sculpture and how it will look.

Draw the sculpture from different angles including a cross section. Together create a plan for how it will be made, including materials, internal structure, safety considerations. Make note of possible challenges.



Andrew Thomas Huang
East Wind [still], 2018
Digital sculpture and motion capture
83.82 x 66.04cm
Photography: Andrew Thomas Huang
Courtesy of the artist

