



chen qiulin.

One Hundred Names

SAM Education Resource

4 JUNE
TO
24 JULY

chen qiulin.

One Hundred Names

Shepparton Art Museum
4 June to 24 July 2016

Education Resource

Acknowledgements

This resource was prepared by Rhonda Chrisanthou, visual arts educator, SAM, 2016.
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This exhibition is proudly presented by Shepparton Art Museum and Greater Shepparton City Council in collaboration with 4A, Centre For Contemporary Asian Art, Sydney.

COVER IMAGE

Chen Qiulin, *The Garden no. 1* 2007

Giclée print, 84 x 68cm

courtesy the artist and A Thousand Plateaus Art Space, Chengdu © the artist.

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planning your visit.

Prior to visiting *Chen Qiulin: One Hundred Names* it is suggested that you contact SAM to determine the following:

- Suitability of content for the year level of your students and the subject area;
- Staff availability for introductory talks and tours;
- Education and public programs, artist talks etc. that support the exhibition;
- An overview of gallery etiquette and amenities for school groups;
- Expectations regarding suitable and safe behaviour in a public space;

Before you visit *Chen Qiulin: One Hundred Names* teachers may wish to discuss the following themes with your students:

- Cultural traditions, economic and social change;
- Displacement and migration;
- Social realism and documentary in art;
- Artists, art museums and audiences in the 21st century.

exhibition description.

陈秋林: 百家姓

Chen Qiulin.
One Hundred Names

Using a combination of photography, video, installation and performance, Chinese artist Chen Qiulin investigates the contradictions that arise when a country tries both to maintain tradition, and to develop rapidly. Her work examines how migration, displacement, and urban development disrupt traditional Chinese ancestry, culture and way of life. While the unusually rapid development of China highlights these issues, they are not unique to China alone, and reflect stories and experiences shared by many in a global developing world.

Raised in Wanzhou City, located in the municipality of Chongqing in Western China, Chen's home city was partially submerged by the construction of the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River in 2003. Her work responds to the lived experience of natural and urban landscapes in flux. Chen began her education when she started accompanying her mother to work at a local film studio in Sichuan. After graduating from Sichuan Fine Arts in 2000, she then returned to the film company to paint billboards and assist in film production.

Chen stages highly theatrical scenes with elaborately costumed characters set against a rapidly changing backdrop of buildings and landscapes. These works are often reminiscent of Chinese theatre and Operatic traditions, with their highly stylized costumes and theatrical make-up. SAM's exhibition includes a survey of the artist's key works, including two new works specifically conceived for her Australian exhibition: *One Hundred Names for Kwong Wah Chong* (2015), and *Scent* (2016) that explores the idea of scent as an evocation.

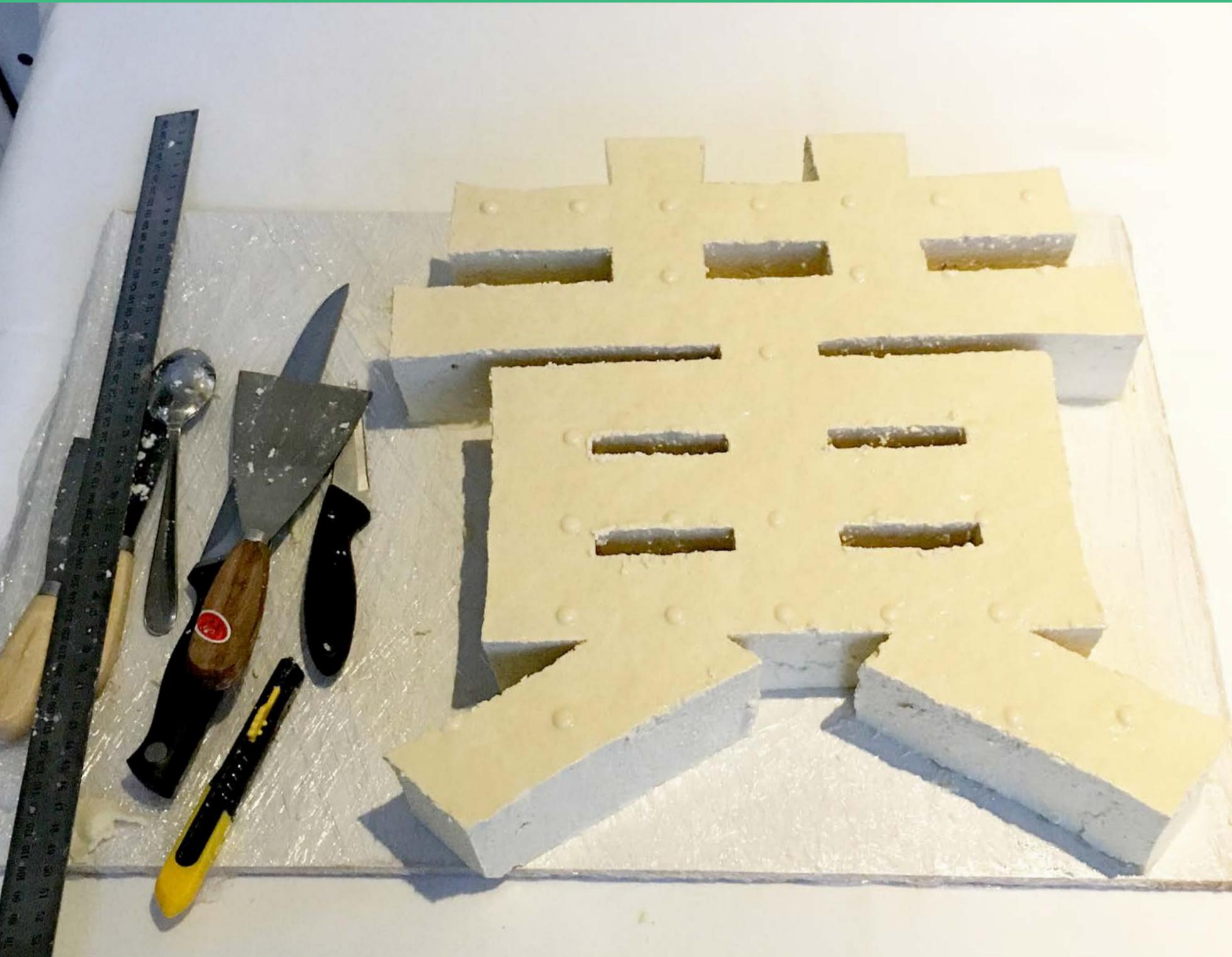
This exhibition is Chen's first Australian exhibition and is a collaborative project between Shepparton Art Museum and 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, Sydney.

artist's biography

Chen Qiulin (b. 1975, Yichang, Hubei Province) belongs to a generation of younger artists whose work articulates the social repercussions of China's ever-constant push for political and economic reform. Visualising the many contradictions inherent to the condition of contemporary living in a country where the tension and conflict between tradition, custom and ritual are consistently challenged, Chen Qiulin's carefully considered photographic and video compositions are powerful provocations of progress and ambition.

Chen Qiulin has participated in numerous exhibitions in China and abroad, recently featured in 7th Gwangju Biennale, Gwangju, Korea, 2008; 'Displacement: The Three Gorges Dam and Contemporary Chinese Art', David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago, USA, 2008; 'China Power Station II', Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, Oslo, Norway, 2007; 'THIS IS NOT FOR YOU – Sculptural Discourses', Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, Vienna, Austria, 2006-2007; and 'The Wall: Reshaping Contemporary Chinese Art', Millenium Art Museum, Beijing, China and Albright-Knox Art Gallery, New York, USA (touring), 2005 and a number of influential solo exhibitions in Hammer Museum, Los Angeles; Max Protetch Gallery, Long March Space, Eli and Edythe Broad Art Museum.

Her works have been collected by many important art galleries, collections and private collectors in the United States and Europe, for example Astrup Fearnley Museum (Norway), Denver Art Museum (USA), Logan Collection (USA), T-BA21, Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary (Austria), Hammer Museum (USA), the Bohen Foundation (New York, USA), Worcester Art Museum (USA), Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art (Australia), Today Art Museum (Beijing, China).



Tofu Carving "Ah Wong" by Chen Qiulin, created at the opening celebrations of *Chen Qiulin. One Hundred Names*, Shepparton Art Museum (SAM) on 4 June 2016.

documentary realism and performance in contemporary art.

In this performance Chen sits at a vanity table located amongst the rubble of a construction site, with new buildings, a coal power plant and factories in the distance. An impromptu audience of Chinese workers look on as Chen is pelted with cakes as she gazes endlessly at herself in the mirror. Her absorption in self is not only symbolic of a new kind of individualism in contemporary China, but also the disparities between an emerging, cosmopolitan middle class and those largely neglected and untouched by China's economic rise.

The work reflects on a Chinese colloquialism translated as 'sweet harm', this phrase signals the double bind of the consumerist impulse, particularly tempting for young women. Older Chinese generations lived through the austerity and harshness of communist China. Chen's generation has not lived through revolutions or hard times. Rather, they are seduced by the sweetness of a prosperous society, while simultaneously experiencing a loss of tradition and historical ancestry.

(opposite)

Chen Qiulin, *Ellisis*, 2001

Series No.1, 58x86cm, Photograph, Giclee Print, 2001, Ed.8, Courtesy the artist and A Thousand Plateaus Art Space, Chengdu
© the artist.



(opposite)

Chen Qiulin, *City Manager* (2015)

Single-channel HD video, sound, 9.25 mins (looped), courtesy the artist and A Thousand Plateaus Art Space, Chengdu
© the artist.

City Manager (2015) is a playful and irreverent examination of the middle manager – a new social strata in Chinese society.

The appearance of this new professional is a reflection of China's rapid urban expansion and economic growth. The changes in China's class system are having a profound impact on shaping the physical and social landscape of contemporary China, with the creation of new corporate, and quasi private/public spaces. The slowed-down footage is accompanied by the musical score of Beethoven's Ode to Joy, a popular tune that is often used to accompany Chinese political events.



responding and exploring.

- Q1.** The Chinese have an expression called 'sweet harm'. What do you think sweet harm might mean? Is there an equivalent Australian colloquialism?
- How is the idea of 'sweet harm' explored by the artist in the video work *Ellisis* (2001)? Refer to both the location and the performance that takes place.
- Q.2.** Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China following the Communist Revolution of 1949, collectivism has been widely championed above individualism by the Communist Party in the 20th century. However, considerable social change has taken place with the rise of individualism and new found wealth or prosperity in the 21st century.
- How do *Ellisis* (2001) and *City Manager* (2015) reflect social change? And what is Chen's response?
- Q3.** What is propaganda? Propaganda is information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote a political cause or point of view.
- Collect media images on a current political issue or theme over a period of two weeks. For example: energy, environment, employment, education. Describe the issue and point of view. Can they be described as propaganda or do they present a balanced point of view?

creating and making.

- A1.** What is decadence? Decadence refers to cultural decline as characterized by excessive indulgence in pleasure or luxury.
- Create a photographic or 2d collage that explores the idea of 'decadence or sweet harm' in a local context.
- A2.** What is satire? In literature, media and the arts the use of satire refers to the use of humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity or vices, particularly in the context of contemporary politics and other comic effect.
- What is parody? Parody is an imitation of the style of a particular writer, artist, or arts based genre with deliberate exaggeration for comic effect.
- Using video, photography or performance, script and develop a visual sequence or single scene that uses satire or parody to explore excesses of individualism or collectivism in our society.
Collect and examine images of young people in advertising and other forms of mass media Use the stylistic features of media images to create an illustration or design a poster that champions youth issues in an Australian context. (Youth 15 to 30 years of age)

vce art / studio arts / media studies.

- Q1.** Social realism is a style of art that was championed in Communist China. It is often seen as propaganda by western or capitalist nations.
- What are the conventions of social realism in art or film? Is it the same or different to realism?
- Q2.** Compare and contrast the use of film codes (composition and framing, types of shots and angles, colour and lighting and editing with the narrative or story conventions (characters, narrator, music, settings, actions) in Chen's *Ellisis*, 2001 with *City Manager*, 2015. Consider differences in Chen's approach to using video to record or document social or cultural change?

elegy and allegories of change.

The Garden Series.

The Garden Series consist of the 3 videos listed below and accompanying photographs taken by Chen between 2002 and 2004.

(opposite)

Chen Qiulin, *River, River*, 2005

Video 16 min 37 sec, ed.5

courtesy the artist and A Thousand Plateaus Art Space, Chengdu © the artist.



Chen follows two teenage narrators and several opera characters as they travel through the remains of her rapidly dissolving hometown. The story is a familiar one for many of the people of the Yangtze River valley who have been forced to witness their memories being washed away with the construction of the world's largest power station, the controversial Three Gorges Dam (built 1994-2008).

The state of emotional agitation reflected in *Farewell Poem* gives way to a more objective documentary approach. In *River, River*, Wanxian is portrayed in a hopeful light, with new buildings and upbeat scenes of daily life contrasted with nostalgia for a traditional past.

Chen Qiulin, *Farewell Poem*, 2002

Video 9 min ed. 5

courtesy the artist and A Thousand Plateaus Art Space, Chengdu © the artist.

Farewell Poem (2002) was made when Chen returned to her home city of Wanxian which was partially submerged by the construction of the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River. The Three Gorges Dam has shattered records and garnered endless attention for the number of people displaced (1.2 million) and the number of cities and towns flooded (13 cities, 140 towns, 1,350 villages).

Shocked by the changes which had occurred in the city, Chen includes footage of the town's destruction intercut with colourful scenes and music from a Chinese opera taken from the film, *Farewell my Concubine*.

As a child, she had accompanied her grandfather, a Sichuan opera aficionado, to many performances.

Farewell Poem functions as an elegy to a disintegrating city, eclipsed by progress. In this series Chen responds to the lived experience of social displacement caused by natural and urban landscapes in flux.

Chen Qiulin, *The Garden*, 2007

Video, 14 min 45 sec, ed.5

courtesy the artist and A Thousand Plateaus Art Space, Chengdu © the artist.

Presented as a video and photographs, *The Garden* (2007) follows two workers as they walk through the city of Wanxian carrying exquisite bunches of pink peony flowers. Their journey through the urban landscape contrasts architecture in various states of decay and neglect. This sits in stark relief against the new construction and rapid growth that characterises much of contemporary China today.

Through its juxtaposition of the old and new, this work can be read as a form of social

documentation that charts change in the name of progress. The carrying of peonies traditionally commemorated the 'opening' of a new town, yet in this context, resonates with a sense of melancholy: a closing ceremony of sorts. A false sense of hope and optimism for the future is also suggested by using plastic not real peonies. This is reinforced by unemployed workers walking the streets of Wanxian carrying vases of peonies and wearing sticks and ropes meaning that they are available for cheap labour.

exploring and responding.

- Q1.** Explore the representation of old and new, or past and present in China in photographic or video artwork by Chen Qiulin. Refer to cultural symbols or motifs used and their repetition.
- Q2.** What is documentary photography or film? How is it different to narrative film? Refer to story, characters, and settings as well as how images are framed, shot, edited, use of sound and narrative voice.
- Q3.** Chen employed local workers rather than actors for the video and photographs in The Garden series? How might this affect viewers in their understanding or viewing of the work?

creating making.

- A1.** Use a cultural motif or symbol that is recognisably Australian to tell a visual story about moving away from home or familiar environments.
- A2.** Create a one minute visual sequence in video or photography to document or record aspects of environmental or social change or an issue in your local area.
- A3.** Looking at Chen's approach to creating 'characters' who represent past cultural traditions in China, use portraiture or performance to show contrasts between past and present, or old and new in Australian culture.

vce art / studio arts / media studies.

- Q1.** Compare *River, River*, 2005 with *The Garden*, 2007. What is the significance of the peonies in The Garden series and how are they used against the background of contrasting scenes of urban decay and development in Wanxian? Refer to both the video and photographs.
- Q2.** What is an elegy? An elegy can be poem of serious reflection, typically a lament for the dead.

What is an allegory? An allegory is a story, poem, or picture which can be interpreted to reveal a hidden meaning, typically a moral or political one.

In both *Farewell Poem* (2002) and *River, River* (2005) Chen Qiulin uses documentary video to record and act as witness to rapid social and cultural change in China wrought through the damming of Yangtze River and construction of the *Three Gorges Dam*, (1994- 2008). While the earlier film has been described as an elegy or lament for displaced lives and lost traditions, *River, River*, (2005) uses allegory to describe the transition from old to new China.

In *River, River* (2005) Chen follows two teenage narrators and several opera characters as they travel through the remains of her hometown Wanxian. Compare *River, River* (2005) with the earlier video *Farewell Poem* (2002) to examine differences in Chen's approach and techniques to document and respond to change video. Consider similarities and differences in characters, settings, points of view, style of filming and editing, lighting and subject matter.

- Q3.** Chen uses both video and photography to document social and environmental change in contemporary China. In your opinion which media works best to convey meaning? Does the gallery context influence your enjoyment and understanding of the artwork?

diversity and identity.



Chen Qiulin, *One Hundred Names for Kwong Wah Chong* 2015
25-channel video installation, mural, dimensions variable
commissioned by 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art
courtesy the artist and A Thousand Plateaus Art Space, Chengdu. © the artist.
Photographer: Diana Spriggs

One Hundred Names for Kwong Wah Chong (2015) is the latest iteration of Chen Qiulin's ongoing project, *One Hundred Surnames* (2004 -), that involves the artist carving a series of Chinese names from tofu. For Chen, tofu is not only one of the oldest and most commonly used culinary ingredients in Chinese cooking, but can also be read as a symbol of material transformation through intensive labour.

Through a series of documentary films, Chen interviews individuals who share family names with Chinese people who first settled in Australia. By asking each participant to describe their favourite recipe with tofu, they reflect on where they came from, family traditions, and cultural differences and similarities. The work was commissioned for 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, located in Sydney's iconic Haymarket district (Sydney's Chinatown), in what was once the city's first Chinese-owned and operated shopfront business, Kwong Wah Chong.

exploring and responding.

- Q1.** Why, when, where and how did Chen Qiulin create *One Hundred Names for Kwong Wah Chong*?
- Q2.** What is the importance of tofu in Chinese culture and what happens to it in the artwork? Why do you think Chen uses tofu to write the names of Chinese immigrant families to Australia?
- Q3.** Describe how Chen Qiulin uses the conventions of documentary media to document or record events, interviews or story-lines in *One Hundred Names for Kwong Wah Chong*, 2015.

creating making.

- A1.** How would you adapt to different language, food, entertainment, school, friends and how would your life change?
- Write and illustrate a picture book about being in a foreign country.
- A2.** What is cultural diversity?
- Use art elements to design your own symbol or sign that represents your family history or culture. Use your design to create a poster that celebrates cultural diversity.
- A3.** *One Hundred Names for Kwong Wah Chong*, 2015 presents aspects of Chinese migration and ancestry history through painting, video interviews and tofu.
- Create a design brief that commissions an artist/performer to create a new artwork that explores aspects of your family or cultural history. What would be the backdrop? What food ingredient? Who would be interviewed?

vce arts / studio arts.

- Q1.** The exhibition, *Chen Qiulin: One Hundred Names* was exhibited in both Sydney and Shepparton in 2016. After viewing the exhibition at SAM Consider the following curatorial elements of design the use of floor and wall spaces with regards to the design elements, use of space and placement of objects. How do spaces differ and how are they are similar? Consider colour schemes, the installation and projection of artworks (photographs, video projections and installations and lighting.
- Q2.** Use contemporary and formal frameworks to explore ideas of cultural identity as presented by Chen Qiulin in the artwork *One Hundred Names for Kwong Wah Chong*, 2015. Compare this artwork with two others in the exhibition with regards to ideas presented, use of media and techniques used.
- Q3.** Compare the work of Chen Qiulin with another artist whose artwork strongly features aspects of their cultural identity or history.
- Q2.** Shepparton Art Museum (SAM) is a public gallery, administered through local government, a member of the Public Galleries Association of Victoria (PGAV) and Museums Australia. 4A is a member of the Contemporary Arts Organisations of Australia and is an independently run arts organization. Both organisations are not-for-profit, but are supported by government and philanthropy.
- How do these organisations promote arts and culture in Australia?
 - List key points of difference between SAM and 4A with regards to their aims, types of exhibitions, location and staffing.
 - How are they similar? You may like to refer to branding and marketing, public programming, publishing, retail, membership and their Foundation's.



references.

Art Net

<http://www.artnet.com/artists/chen-qiulin/ellisis-a-qa4RzRU8QZbKxLSpBZfAYA2>

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