

MODERN ART

QUEST FOR CALM

Cui Xiuwen focuses on different phases of life in a solo exhibition in Beijing, Lin Qi reports.

Cui Xiuwen was playing hopscotch as a child in one of her dreams. She also saw the many phases of her life — evolving from a newborn to a little girl and then an artist.

That dream is the inspiration behind Cui's ongoing exhibition, *Light*, at Peking University's Arthur M. Sackler Museum of Art and Archaeology. She has created several installations that take viewers on a journey through life, similar to how one progresses while playing a children's game.

The 46-year-old lives in Beijing and is considered a leading contemporary Chinese artist for embracing a feminine perspective in her figurative paintings and vanguard video works. Her recent creations, though, have become more abstract, engaging a broader scope of thinking in terms of religion and philosophy.

At her current show, Cui arranges the works in four sections, each exploring one dimension of a person's existence: physical being, heart, soul and destiny. She adopts a simple color scheme using such colors as red, green, yellow and blue, which she believes encapsulate enormous energies that enrich the vision of humans.

The installation *Body* at the museum's entrance invites people to become a part of the work. One can sit, lean or lie down on the colored cubes that are made of foam rubble and wrapped in flannel of varying sizes.

Proceeding to the museum's courtyard, visitors can see at



Cui Xiuwen is hosting her solo show, *Light*, in Beijing, displaying installations that explore different dimensions of a person's existence. The 30-meter-long passage leading to the main exhibition is set to engage viewers in a journey of "soul searching". PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

the center a huge Taihu stone, a type of rock with holes that was widely used in classical Chinese gardens as a symbol of Taoism. The rock is said to date to the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127) and now is part of a permanent display at

the same museum.

Cui encircles the rock with several cubic metal frames, by which she suggests an infusion of Chinese and Western cultures.

She says the beautiful rock, representing the tradition of



Chinese art, is at the heart of her work that she also calls *Heart*. The frames symbolize Western contemporary art that has been introduced to Chinese artists since the 1980s.

"Such encounters between the past and present, East and

West, tangible and intangible are opening the minds of artists of my generation," she says.

The main exhibition hall behind the Taihu stone displays Cui's other interactive installations, which produce effects of light and seek to

engage viewers in a process of "soul searching".

People can walk through a 30-meter-long passage filled with artificial light, with dozens of luminous red frames twisted in varying angles.

In two dark rooms set up in

If you go

9 am-4:30 pm, through Aug 27. Arthur M. Sackler Museum of Art and Archaeology, Peking University, 5 Yiheyuan Road, Haidian district, Beijing. 010-6275-9784.

the same hall, images of colorful blocks are projected on the ground. When visitors hop on the blocks, the blocks disappear, giving the feeling that "you're falling from somewhere into a hole of darkness", Cui says.

The exhibition is presented by the Jillian Sackler international artists project. It was launched in 2013 by Jillian Sackler, widow of Arthur M. Sackler, an American physician and collector, who proposed and sponsored the building of the Sackler museum. The project brings to the venue an artist's solo exhibition every year, shedding light on cultural communication from individual perspectives.

Miguel A. Benavides, the exhibition curator from the United States, says that, like the project's previous participants, Cui has drawn on personal experiences to create touching works that "talk to each other" and showcase her understanding of Chinese traditions against a modern background.

Explaining her shift from figurative to abstract Zen-like way of creating, Cui says she has been reading a lot on religion and philosophy. She also meditates daily, a practice that has helped her review her works in a calmer, comprehensive manner.

"Reading the books has opened a door on the path of my life. It sometimes shuts and reopens when I'm awakened by more reading," she says. "In the process, my life has been scaled up bit by bit."

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PHOTOGRAPHY

Dozens seek to capture glimpses of Xinjiang

By DENG ZHANGYU
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More than 30 photographers are spending three months in Northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region to capture its natural and cultural landscapes.

The team will visit through August different parts of the region, including Hami, which is known for its sweet melons, and Turpan, home to the famous Flaming Mountain.

The project, initiated by Japanese camera maker Canon six years ago, aims to use photos and videos to showcase fading cultural heritage in China. Every year, it will organize one or two such trips.

"If you want to understand the vast land of Xinjiang, you have to come a few times, and each time you need to stay for a month at least," says Liu Bing, honorary president of the region's writers association.

The land is not only the largest in size at the provincial level in China but, more importantly, it's a place where the cultures of the East and West meet, integrating over thousands of years.

"From one place to another in the region, cultures, landscapes and languages change," he says.

Xie Chao, a participating photographer, says he was in Hami at the start of the trip earlier this month to focus on Hami Muqam, a cultural genre of the region.

Muqam refers to a variety of practices involving songs, dances, folk and classical music in Xinjiang. It's included



Cultural heritage like traditional songs and dances in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region is the focus of a photography project. XIE CHAO / PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

on UNESCO's list of intangible cultural heritage.

Xie says he captures daily life in the area through the dance and music of the local people. They dance elegantly, very differently from the Dolan Muqam, which is another genre that stresses energy and power, and therefore has stronger body movements.

Liu, the expert, says people in Hami mostly farm fruit so their art is agrarian, while the Dolan people's musical expressions reflect the challenges they face in the Taklimakan Desert.

Xie and other photographers have also visited local

embroidery houses in Hami, where the traditional skills are passed down through generations.

As for the Kyrgyz epic *Manas*, an elderly man of the area could recite it, but he died last year. Fortunately, people had made a video to document a recital before his death.

"It's important to use all kinds of methods to protect such cultural heritage," says Liu, adding that many of the practitioners are now old.

In the past two years, the photography project has shifted its attention to heritage along the ancient Silk Road. It has organized trips to Henan, Shaanxi and Gansu provinces.

All the pictures and videos have been given to the local governments and the Ministry of Culture.

Lu Jie, communications director for Canon China, says the project found that a lot of heritage has been ruined by modern influences in the country but some has been revived through integration as well.

"We can't have these great cultural traditions only displayed in museums. So we have to act right now," she says.

Selected photographs taken on the ongoing trip will be displayed in Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang, later in the year.

AUTHENTICITY DEBATE

Modigliani work claimed found in flea market draws posers

By ASSOCIATED PRESS
in Rome

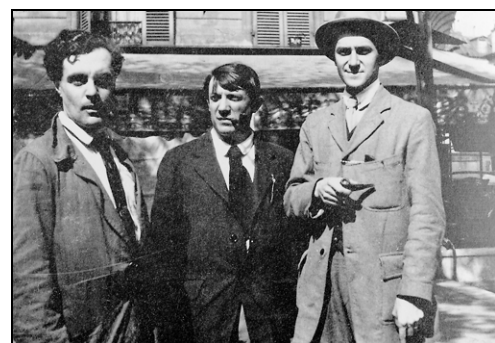
It's a story almost too fantastical to be true: A flea market dealer finds a painting near a subway trash bin, submits it for laboratory analysis and emerges convinced he has a Modigliani on his hands. No one would believe it, given the modernist master is one of the most sought-after and forged artists around.

But a public relations firm in Rome that doubles as the Amedeo Modigliani Institute is claiming a signed portrait of *Odette* could be a real deal. It's putting the work on public view this week saying it hopes to start an academic debate on its authenticity.

"I assure you, this isn't a fake and we are dealing with a discovery," insists Luciano Renzi, the institute's president and head of an eponymous publicity firm. While acknowledging that experts must make such a certification, he says he wouldn't put it up to critical review "if the institute didn't firmly believe it".

But the institute, which has no role or expertise in authenticating Modigliani works, has a financial interest in drumming up publicity for its exhibit, and even the lab it hired refuses to date the painting.

Amedeo Modigliani died in 1920 in Paris at the age of 35 of tubercular meningitis after a short but intense career that produced masterpieces:



This undated photograph shows (from left) Italian painter and sculptor Amedeo Modigliani, Spanish painter and sculptor Pablo Picasso and French poet Andre Salmon. AP

portraits, nudes and sculptures, many featuring the distinctive lithe necks of his muses. The most authoritative catalog of his works, completed in 1972 by critic Ambrogio Ceroni, lists 337 known pieces.

The timing of *Odette's* appearance is certainly suspect: In November, Modigliani's *Nu Couché (Reclining Nude)* fetched \$170 million at a Christie's auction in New York, the second-highest price ever paid for an artwork at auction. A host of museum exhibits around the globe are planned in the run-up to the 2020 centenary of his death.

And it comes as the Amedeo Modigliani Institute tries to recover from a credibility scandal involving forgeries. Its past president, Christian Parisot, was arrested in 2012 on charges he knowingly

authenticated fake works. Parisot and Renzi founded the institute a decade ago to house the artist's documentary archive, which had been bequeathed to Parisot by Modigliani's only daughter. The institute wasn't implicated in the scandal, but its reputation suffered by association.

Experts cautioned that any purported Modigliani must be greeted with an overdose of skepticism, given the propensity for hoaxes, fakes and forgeries and the financial interests of all involved.

The owner hasn't come forward publicly. His Rome-based lawyer, Gennaro Arbia, admits his client wants to sell the work.

What if *Odette* is found to be a fake?

Arbia pauses. "The dream is over."