

This exhibition features three large-scale video works by Wang Gongxin, who is a major practitioner in Chinese video art.

Born in Beijing in 1960, Wang Gongxin initially trained as an oil painter. In 1988 he was a visiting scholar at State University in New York, where he first encountered video art. He began to produce his own video work in 1993 and two years later returned to Beijing, where he became one of the key figures in the Chinese avant-garde video movement. Wang Gongxin turned his home and, later, a corner of a relative's restaurant into galleries where fellow artists could meet and exhibit. He is credited as one of the first artists to have created a site-specific video installation in China in the mid 1990s.

As a first-generation Chinese video artist, Wang Gongxin has commented that he is concerned with political and social issues, as well as with history and tradition. He often displays a subtle humour in his work, subverting viewers' expectations by turning seemingly ordinary situations upside down. As the critic Pi Li has noted, Wang Gongxin's work 'doesn't escape reality, but many of his pieces make reality just a little lighter'.

WANG Gongxin

Chinese 1960–

The dinner table

2006

painted Pine (*Pinus sp.*) and steel table, single channel
colour video, stereo sound, ed. 3/3, 5 min 10 sec

Yvonne Pettengell Bequest, 2013

A lavish Chinese banquet sits atop an improbably tilted dining table. Slowly, the scene shifts as the plates of food defy gravity and move upwards, eventually disappearing from the table completely so that only the stained tablecloth remains. This surprising and amusing effect is typical of Wang Gongxin's interest in challenging our ordinary, everyday perceptions.

WANG Gongxin

Chinese 1960–

Relating – it's all about Ya

2010

nine channel colour video, sound, 6 min

Collection of the artist

'Ya' is a key phrase used by Chinese opera singers to suggest a challenge or change of circumstances. In *Relating – it's all about Ya*, the long, wavering sound of 'Ya' provides an opening refrain that is accompanied by images of seemingly disconnected objects – coins, banquet tables, high-heel shoes, belly flab, breasts and swaying bamboo – evoking the frenetic pace and hubbub of daily life in China. This nine-channel installation also reflects the internet era, particularly our predilection as viewers to surf across a series of seemingly unrelated sites on multiple tabs or screens.

WANG Gongxin

Chinese 1960–

Basic colour

2010

five channel colour video, sound, 15 min

Collection of the artist

Basic colour is a series of five vertical projections that in their orientation recall traditional Chinese scrolls. Each channel features tightly framed close-ups of the human body. The undulating curves and creases of each form are suggestive of landscapes, an effect enhanced by accumulations of brightly coloured pigment that gently shower upon the bodies, eventually covering them completely. This visual metaphor of 'body as landscape' is enhanced by a soundtrack of rain falling, further accentuating the 'rain' of pigments.

For Kids

Wang Gongxin wanted to turn something ordinary, which we see all the time, into something extraordinary. That's why, in this work of art, he turned a meal into a floating, messy masterpiece!

Watch as the plates of delicious food float away and disappear, making a big mess as they go.

Sometimes people share a banquet like this to celebrate a special occasion. What foods do you love to eat on special occasions?

For Kids

Things are not always as they seem ...

At first, the sections of this video seem to show strange landscapes being slowly covered by colourful powder.

But take a closer look – the coloured powder is actually being sprinkled on different parts of the human body!

Can you figure out which body parts they are?