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Gaskin, Sam. "Sun Xun Illustrates Declaration of Independence for Asia Society Triennial." *Ocula*. September 17, 2020.

OCULA

The Chinese artist's folding painting shows The Statue of Liberty in pieces as dragons and devils assail the state.



Sun Xun, July Coming Soon, detail, (2019). Ink and color on silk album 24-page folding album. Courtesy of the artist and ShanghART Gallery. Photograph: Alex Wang.

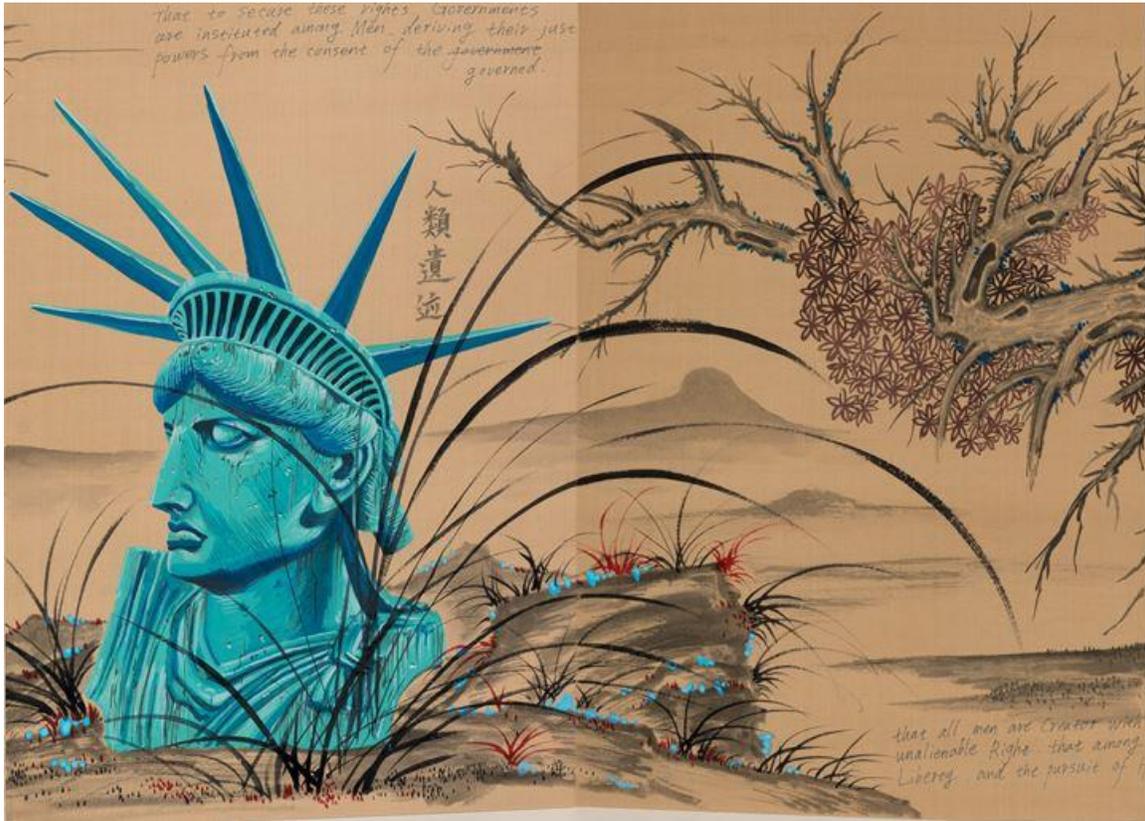
Asia Society has announced the opening programme for the inaugural Asia Society Triennial, entitled *We Do Not Dream Alone*, which will showcase over 40 artists and collectives from 19 countries beginning on 27 October.

Alongside the exhibition at the [Asia Society Museum, New York](#), and venues across the city, a series of virtual panels will take place beginning on 28 October with a discussion of [Xu Bing](#) and [Sun Xun's](#) project *We the People: Xu Bing and Sun Xun Respond to the Declaration of Independence*. The artists will discuss their work, commissioned especially for the event, with Agnes Hsu-Tang, Executive Chair of the Triennial and Chair of the Triennial steering committee in a session moderated by guest curator Susan Beningson.

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Sun Xun's painting *July Coming Soon* (2019) is one part of *We the People*, which was created in response to a rare 19th Century print of the Declaration of Independence. Depicted in the 24-page folding album, which opens to a width of almost eight metres, is a broken Statue of Liberty reduced to the size of a scholar's rock and rendered in the blues and greens typical of Chinese ink paintings of landscapes.



Sun Xun, July Coming Soon, detail, (2019). Ink and color on silk album 24-page folding album. Courtesy of the artist and ShanghART Gallery. Photograph: Alex Wang.

The drama of the painting comes from the threats against the state that the Declaration of Independence sought to guard against. The dragon, pictured top, is accompanied by an excerpt about 'the dangers of invasion from without and convulsions within,' while a long-bearded man on fire is accompanied by the words 'a prince, [whose] character is thus marked by every act which may define a Tyrant is unfit to be the ruler of a free people.'

Xu Bing, for his part in the project, used silkworms to weave a cocoon around a copy of another momentous text, Confucius's *The Analects*, in a work entitled *Silkworm Book: Analects of Confucius* (2019). According to Hsu-Tang, who studied the beginnings of US-China relations, including an essay series called *From the Morals of Confucius* (1738) Benjamin Franklin published in *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, the work leaves 'Confucius's ancient words faintly legible through filaments of silk as if the words were conjured from a dream. This illusory

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revelation must have been what Benjamin Franklin experienced when he first read The Analects, in Latin translation, 282 years ago.'

While both Xu and Sun have received significant recognition in the United States, the Triennial's Artistic Director Boon Hui Tan said he and co-curator Michelle Yun had largely looked to include artists who have not had major institutional presentations in New York or the USA.

'Michelle brought Kim Sooja who has literally been featured in every major biennial in Europe and Asia but has hardly had major shows in New York,' he said, while he invited 'Kevork Mourad, an American artist of Syrian and Armenian descent who as been based in New York for more than a decade but has not been really shown in institutions here.'

Among the most pivotal works in the exhibition, Tan said, is Ken + Julia Yonetani's *Three Wishes* (2014), which includes a children's book based on a Walt Disney video used to promote atomic power entitled *Our Friend The Atom* (1956) alongside efforts by a Japanese laboratory studying the long term genetic mutations of moths affected by the Fukushima fallout.

'The polarization of ideas and positions that one finds too easily in political discourse and the media often elides out how messy issues like environmental safety, racism, [and] authoritarianism are,' he said, adding that one of art's roles is to help us think through the complexities of such issues.

In addition to the talk with Xu and Sun, other panels announced as part of the Triennial include: a discussion of contemporary artistic practices with artists Kevork Mourad, Nasim Nasr, and Ken + Julia Yonetani chaired by Tan; reflections on Asian American and Asian diaspora artists in the United States; and a session on Korean contemporary art in light of the ongoing tensions between North Korea and South Korea moderated by Yun.

The Asia Society Triennial will take place in two parts. The first will be on view 27 October, 2020–7 February, 2021, and the second from 16 March–27 June, 2021. —[O]

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