

SEAN KELLY

Sartore, Mara. "Time Spy: an Interview with Sun Xun about his future project," *My Art Guides*, March 29, 2016.

My Art Guides

Time Spy: an Interview
with Sun Xun about his
future project



Sun Xun, considered one of China's most talented young artists, will collaborate with the commission's guest curator Ruijun Shen and Audemars Piguet on the production of a major new artwork to be unveiled at Art Basel in Miami Beach, in December 2016.

Mara Sartore: As you are an artist but also a film maker – invited to many important international film festivals – I would like to start by asking you which are, in your experience, the differences and the links between art and cinema.

Sun Xun: I'd like to tell you about the differences. The people in the two fields are different people from different worlds. They understand different things, so for example, my films don't have a story, so film people don't understand them but the art people. The people in the film industry believe in stories, while the people in the art world believe in images. It's a different language system.

MS: I've been directing a short film festival for 15 years and now I'm in the selection committee of prize for young Italian directors. I had a long discussion with a famous Italian producer arguing about a film which I wanted in the competition but he didn't want it because, according to him, there was no story, so I totally agree with you.

SX: He didn't see a story in that film, but you were able to imagine it. Some people believe in what they can see and some people think that they can also believe what they cannot see. For example you cannot see your air, but you have to believe that air is here even if you can't see it.

I think the problem is that the film festival system is almost over. The art world system is also close to the end. After HK I will go to Germany and I will have a solo exhibition at the Oberhausen Film Festival. In Europe the film festivals are more and more about art, they are trying to find a way to develop, not by choosing big stars, otherwise they would become another Hollywood. So Rotterdam, Venice, Berlin also talk about art, it's not just about films.

As we said, cinema and art are two different worlds but nowadays, in Europe, cinema is more connected to art. In ten years the art world and the cinema industry will be together.

William Kentridge also joined the Venice Film Festival, more and more artists join film festivals and show their work in cinemas. At a film festival they worry about mass people's taste, while in the art world they only worry about 10% of people's taste. Like you said about that film, you could imagine the story so you could get into the work, but other people can't.

MS: In your creation there's a part of the work which/that includes sketches, drawings and woodcuts and which will then fit into a minute of frame. Could you explain your creative process?

SX: My film doesn't have a storyboard; I'm just thinking and changing it while I think which kind of film I should do. I make a film while discussing the result with the characters.

MS: It's like a dialogue between yourself and your creation and the story is the result of this dialogue...

SX: Yes, I don't separate film, story, drawing like you would do in the traditional film industry: I do everything together, film, story, sound, drawing...

MS: Does it happen to you to be surprised by the final result of your work?

SX: Absolutely yes, I make a plan but the result is either worse or much better than the original plan.

MS: Your studio is in Beijing, have you always lived there your entire life?

SX: No, I haven't and I also travel a lot.

MS: Do you get a lot of inspiration from your travels?

SX: A lot!

MS: Could you tell us a little bit about your work? What is your source of inspiration?

SX: If you're an art professional we will discuss art, if you're just normal people I will tell you a story.

MS: I would like to hear a story.

SX: I never talk about art, I try to use different ways to explain my work. But normally my inspiration comes from a trip to another country and the knowledge I can get about its history and culture. When I went to Perugia, I was inspired by Italian food, landscape and history. I stayed in a very old castle in a residency with several artists, including Manfredi Beninati. We also worked together in Beijing and I learned a lot about the Italian culture from him.

MS: How long did you stay in Perugia for?

SX: I stayed there for three weeks and I finished some drawings while I was there. I couldn't find the ink I needed but I finished them with acrylic. I started and finished some drawings. I got a lot of ideas from life there and from the way we lived while staying in the castle. We stayed up till late at the night and always drinking a lot of wine. The people from the kitchen thought we were crazy and locked all the alcohol away, so we had to walk for half an hour to the first town to find a bar. Manfredi met other Italians there and they had a very nice chat but I can't understand Italian. The people were so nice, so we went to their house and we drunk a lot there as well. Suddenly they started fighting. But I couldn't understand why. One minute before they were very happy and the minute after – they were fighting. Italian people are very open and free, so I just sat there and watched, as if it was a film; but because I was Manfredi's friend they kicked us both out on the street. We were so drunk, I thought we were going to sleep on the street but Manfredi stopped a police car and explained the situation and surprisingly the police drove us to the castle. The day after I asked Manfredi about the fight and he told me that all Italian people are stupid. I told him he's also Italian and he replied that it wasn't correct because he's Sicilian! I couldn't understand why – for me Italy is Italy – but then I studied the history of the country and I understood. I could find some inspiration from these events. After getting to know more about the

history of Italy, I even watched with a different eye Fellini's films and I started liking his movies more and more.

MS: What about the source of inspiration for this project you are working on for Audemars Piguet? Is the inspiration coming from your visit to Le Brassus?

SX: Totally from there.

MS: How long did you stay there?

SX: Almost one week, and I had the chance to hear some beautiful stories. I went to the village and talked to the people there, I walked by myself and observed life there and now I know why Audemars Piguet has chosen Le Brassus. It's one of the best places on Earth to watch the stars; and the air is so clean! The people that watch the stars stop thinking about life. Space is huge but we are limited, so I felt the need to find what could be huge but limited at the same time, and my answer to this is: "Only Time can be both huge and limited". I decided to work on this concept of "Time". This is my starting point and now I will work to develop it. The film title in Chinese will be: "Catch time people" and in English "Time Spy", and, just to let you know, you're the first journalist I'm telling the title. But the question is: Who does the "Time Spy" work for? For God? For Art? For what? I've just started to work on it. The material is wood cut and then 3D glasses to look at it. Sun Xun, considered one of China's most talented young artists, will collaborate with the commission's guest curator Ruijun Shen and Audemars Piguet on the production of a major new artwork to be unveiled at Art Basel in Miami Beach, in December 2016.

Mara Sartore: As you are an artist but also a film maker – invited to many important international film festivals – I would like to start by asking you which are, in your experience, the differences and the links between art and cinema.

Sun Xun: I'd like to tell you about the differences. The people in the two fields are different people from different worlds. They understand different things, so for example, my films don't have a story, so film people don't understand them but the art people. The people in the film industry believe in stories, while the people in the art world believe in images. It's a different language system.

MS: I've been directing a short film festival for 15 years and now I'm in the selection committee of prize for young Italian directors. I had a long discussion with a famous Italian producer arguing about a film which I wanted in the competition but he didn't want it because, according to him, there was no story, so I totally agree with you.

SX: He didn't see a story in that film, but you were able to imagine it. Some people believe in what they can see and some people think that they can also believe what they cannot see. For example you cannot see your air, but you have to believe that air is here even if you can't see it.

I think the problem is that the film festival system is almost over. The art world system is also close to the end. After HK I will go to Germany and I will have a solo exhibition at the Oberhausen Film Festival. In Europe the film festivals are more and more about art, they are trying to find a way to develop, not by choosing big stars, otherwise they would become another Hollywood. So Rotterdam, Venice, Berlin also talk about art, it's not just about films.

As we said, cinema and art are two different worlds but nowadays, in Europe, cinema is more connected to art. In ten years the art world and the cinema industry will be together.

William Kentridge also joined the Venice Film Festival, more and more artists join film festivals and show their work in cinemas. At a film festival they worry about mass people's taste, while in the art world they only worry about 10% of people's taste. Like you said about that film, you could imagine the story so you could get into the work, but other people can't.

MS: In your creation there's a part of the work which/that includes sketches, drawings and woodcuts and which will then fit into a minute of frame. Could you explain your creative process?

SX: My film doesn't have a storyboard; I'm just thinking and changing it while I think which kind of film I should do. I make a film while discussing the result with the characters.

MS: It's like a dialogue between yourself and your creation and the story is the result of this dialogue...

SX: Yes, I don't separate film, story, drawing like you would do in the traditional film industry: I do everything together, film, story, sound, drawing...

MS: Does it happen to you to be surprised by the final result of your work?

SX: Absolutely yes, I make a plan but the result is either worse or much better than the original plan.

MS: Your studio is in Beijing, have you always lived there your entire life?

SX: No, I haven't and I also travel a lot.

MS: Do you get a lot of inspiration from your travels?

SX: A lot!

MS: Could you tell us a little bit about your work? What is your source of inspiration?

SX: If you're an art professional we will discuss art, if you're just normal people I will tell you a story.

MS: I would like to hear a story.

SX: I never talk about art, I try to use different ways to explain my work. But normally my inspiration comes from a trip to another country and the knowledge I can get about its history and culture. When I went to Perugia, I was inspired by Italian food, landscape and history. I stayed in a very old castle in a residency with several artists, including Manfredi Beninati. We also worked together in Beijing and I learned a lot about the Italian culture from him.

MS: How long did you stay in Perugia for?

SX: I stayed there for three weeks and I finished some drawings while I was there. I couldn't find the ink I needed but I finished them with acrylic. I started and finished some drawings. I got a lot of ideas from life there and from the way we lived while staying in the castle. We stayed up till late at the night and always drinking a lot of wine. The people from the kitchen thought we were crazy and locked all the alcohol away, so we had to walk for half an hour to the first town to find a bar. Manfredi met other Italians there and they had a very nice chat but I can't understand Italian. The people were so nice, so we went to their house and we drunk a lot there as well. Suddenly they started fighting. But I couldn't understand why. One minute before they were very happy and the minute after – they were fighting. Italian people are very open and free, so I just sat there and watched, as if it was a film; but because I was Manfredi's friend they kicked us both out on the street. We were so drunk, I thought we were going to sleep on the street but Manfredi stopped a police car and explained the situation and surprisingly the police drove us to the castle. The day after I asked Manfredi about the fight and he told me that all Italian people are stupid. I told him he's also Italian and he replied that it wasn't correct because he's Sicilian! I couldn't understand why – for me Italy is Italy – but then I studied the history of the country and I understood. I could find some inspiration from these events. After getting to know more about the history of Italy, I even watched with a different eye Fellini's films and I started liking his movies more and more.

MS: What about the source of inspiration for this project you are working on for Audemars Piguet? Is the inspiration coming from your visit to Le Brassus?

SX: Totally from there.

MS: How long did you stay there?

SX: Almost one week, and I had the chance to hear some beautiful stories. I went to the village and talked to the people there, I walked by myself and observed life there and now I know why Audemars Piguet has chosen Le Brassus. It's one of the best places on Earth to watch the stars; and the air is so clean! The people that watch the stars stop thinking about life. Space is huge but we are limited, so I felt the need to find what could be huge but limited at the same time, and my answer to this is: "Only Time can be both huge and limited". I decided to work on this concept of "Time". This is my starting point and now I will work to develop it. The film title in Chinese will be: "Catch time people" and in English "Time Spy", and, just to let you know, you're the first journalist I'm telling the title. But the question is: Who does the "Time Spy" work for? For God? For Art? For what? I've just started to work on it. The material is wood cut and then 3D glasses to look at it.



Installation view of The Time Vivarium at Sean Kelly, New York. Photography: Jason Wyche, New York. Courtesy: Sean Kelly, New York



The Time Vivarium - 14, 2014 © Sun Xun Courtesy: Sean Kelly, New York



Installation view of The Time Vivarium at Sean Kelly, New York, 2015. Photography: Jason Wyche, New York. Courtesy: Sean Kelly, New York