

# Research Portal

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## Application - Insight Development Grants

### Identification

#### Applicant

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**Family Name:** Thomas

**First Name:** Jesse

**Middle Names:** Powell

**Current Position:** Assistant professor

**Primary Affiliation:** University of Alberta

**Department/Division:** Department of Art and Design

#### Application

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**Application Title** Ink and Oil: Canadian and Chinese Collaborative Perspectives on Nature and Culture

**Committee** 03 - Fine Arts, Research-Creation

**Joint or special initiative** Select

**Is this a [research-creation project](#)?**  Yes  No

**Does your proposal involve [Aboriginal Research](#) as defined by SSHRC?**  Yes  No

#### Scholar Type

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**Are you an [Emerging Scholar](#) or [Established Scholar](#)?** Emerging

Have you received a previous grant (with the exception of a fellowship and/or knowledge mobilization grant) as principal investigator or project director, through any of the following organizations: SSHRC, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, or Canadian Institutes of Health Research?

Yes  No

When did or will you obtain your highest degree? For doctoral and master's degrees, this is the thesis defense date for the first highest degree obtained.

2003-05

Do you currently hold a tenured or tenure-track postsecondary appointment?

Yes  No

When did you obtain your tenured or tenure-track position?

2012-07

Confirmed Scholar Type **Emerging**

## Administering Organization

**Organization** University of Alberta

**Department/Division** Art and Design

## Invitations

Role	Last Name	First Name	Organization	Department
Collaborator	Wei			
Collaborator	Zheng			

## Activity Details

### Certification Requirements

Does the proposed research involve humans as research participants?

Yes  No

Does the proposed research involve animals?

Yes  No

## Environmental Impact

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Yes  No

**A. Will any phase of the proposed research take place on federal lands in Canada, other than lands under the administration and control of the Commissioner of Yukon, the Northwest Territories or Nunavut, as interpreted in section 2(1) of the [Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, 2012](#) (CEAA 2012)?**

Yes  No

**B. Will any phase of the proposed research take place outdoors and outside of Canada?**

Yes  No

**C. (i) Will the grant permit a designated project, as listed in the CEAA 2012 [Regulations Designating Physical Activities](#) (RDPA), to be carried out in whole or in part?**

**OR** **(ii) Will any phase of the proposed research depend on a designated project, as listed in the RDPA, being carried out by a third party?**  
[Regulations Designating Physical Activities](#)

Yes  No

**PART I: To be completed if “Yes” response to question A or B OR A and B above**

**1. Name and/or co-ordinates of location** Zhengzhou, China and environs

**2. Principal activity(ies) and activity component(s) to be undertaken at the location**

Gathering of photographic material for paintings to be produced in a studio environment. I will take photographs while accompanied by Chinese host professor from that city.

**PART III: To be completed if activity(ies) will take place outside of Canada**

**5. List the components of the environment that will be affected, and describe these effects.**

N/A

**6. Describe mitigation measures, follow-up programs and/or monitoring programs that may be required with respect to the above effects.**

N/A

**7. List any permits/authorizations required to undertake the field work, including the name of the issuing agency(ies).**

N/A

## Keywords

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**List up to 10 keywords that best describe the proposal.**

research-creation, fine arts, painting, social ecology, Chinese-Canadian cultural exchange

## Disciplines

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**Indicate and rank up to three disciplines relevant to your proposal, with #1 the most relevant and #3 the least relevant.**

1. Fine Arts Visual Arts
2. Urban and Regional Studies, Environmental Studies Human Ecology
3. Communications and Media Studies Non-verbal Communication

## Areas of Research

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**Indicate and rank up to three areas of research relevant to your proposal, with #1 the most relevant and #3 the least relevant. If you select "Not Subject to Research Classification" in #1, the system will automatically remove any other areas of research when you save this page.**

1. Arts and culture
2. Environment and Sustainability
3. Global/Climate Change

## Temporal Periods

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**Indicate up to two historical periods covered by your proposal.**

	From		To	
	Year	Period	Year	Period
1.	<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>	
2.	<input type="text"/>		<input type="text"/>	

## Geographical Regions

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**Indicate and rank up to three geographical regions relevant to your proposal, with #1 the most relevant and #3 the least relevant.**

1. North America
2. East Asia
3. Western Europe

## Countries

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**Indicate and rank up to five countries relevant to your proposal, with #1 the most relevant and #5 the least relevant.**

1. Canada
2. China
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

## Revisions since previous application

## Summary of Proposal

### PROJECT SUMMARY

In light of new critical scholarship on the acute crises of global climate change, human resource consumption, and the environment we ask in this project “What is a contemporary landscape?” and “How can rethinking our relationship to the environment in terms of the new social ecology (rather than the binary of culture and nature) help us to find new solutions to the challenges of global warming?” This intercultural, collaborative research-creation project will situate traditional bodies of skill-based maker knowledge within a theoretical framework—specifically, I will explore the history of ideas and images in traditional Chinese Daoist Shan Shui ink and brush images, along with Western romantic landscape paintings that are rooted in Kant’s idea of the ‘sublime.’ We will create a collaborative body of artworks, harnessing and interweaving the material processes of these two distinct intellectual and artistic traditions to interrogate the historical present.

China has recently become the largest economy in the world, along with being the biggest producer of greenhouse gases, even while paradoxically being the leading investor in renewable energy research. Canada has long had an interest in environmental issues and now that China is Canada’s second largest trade partner, these shared interests will surely grow. Cultural geography makes clear that the natural environment provides a setting for cultural processes and belief systems to develop; the resulting landscapes thus form a diverse social and geographical archive of human endeavour. This ecological framework will inform our work, supporting our production of visual art that simultaneously functions at the aesthetic, cognitive, and ethical levels. As a research-creation project, we make a claim for the intrinsic presence of a research component in all traditional media-based artistic production that aims to produce critically informed work through material knowledge and experimentation.

I have two key collaborators that make this project feasible. Zheng Beizheng, Professor in Art and Design at the Zhengzhou University of Light Industry, and I will initially work together on research and development of form, experimenting with combinations of process and medium (combining oil, ink, and digital print on various supports) that represent each country’s material traditions. We will document and record this collaborative exchange. Professor Hua Wei, an art historian specializing in the history of traditional Chinese landscape painting, will work with us to situate our artistic creation in relation to that tradition, as well as exploring ways that the production of innovative new form and content within these paintings can engage audiences to focus attention, ask questions, and reveal new knowledge.

This project will encourage dialogue and raise awareness at an intercultural level through its exchange of scholarship, an art exhibition in Edmonton and Zhengzhou, an exhibition catalogue, and four critical essays published in both English and Mandarin. Mandarin is the 3rd most commonly spoken language in Canada, and 5% of Canadians can claim Chinese heritage. In addition, this project aligns with multiple Canadian government and institutional imperatives to strengthen cultural and research ties between the two countries.

This project will also create a new international research network between the University of Alberta and the Zhengzhou University of Light Industry. It will address research questions that are of interest to a wide variety of audiences in both Canada and China, and it will provide two graduate students at the University of Alberta with exceptional professional training experience.

## Roles and Responsibilities

### ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

I am the principal applicant for this project and will be working with an interdisciplinary team of collaborators over the two-year duration of the project to produce artworks for exhibition and a catalogue, including images and scholarly essays. I will be on sabbatical from July 2018 through June 2019 during which time this project will be the major focus of my research. In the second year of funding I will once again have teaching (40%) and service (20%) responsibilities, completing this project will occupy the remaining 40% (research) component of my professional duties at the University of Alberta.

As the principal applicant I will be responsible for the initial design of this research creation project. This encompasses managing the project timeline and activities, and training and supervising two student GRAs. I will work with another artist to produce a series of paintings for exhibition at three venues: two in Zhengzhou, China, and one in Edmonton. I will be the principal organizer of the Canadian venue.

Professor Zheng Beizheng (collaborator) is Professor and Coordinator of the painting program at the Zhengzhou University of Light Industry (ZZULI). He will be my primary collaborator in the studio production of artistic works. Beizheng's familiarity with the media and ideas of Chinese and Western painting make him the ideal partner for the production of this work. He is a visual artist and a musician, performing experimental, improvisational hip hop in the Zhengzhou avant garde music scene. Beizheng will visit the University of Alberta in October of 2019 so that we can conduct initial stages of collaborative artistic production together. Due to his connections with the owners of the experimental art space Rainbow Art Gallery in Zhengzhou he will organize the exhibition of our artworks there in February 2020.

Professor Esther Hua Wei (collaborator) is Professor of Art History at the Zhengzhou University of Light Industry. She is an expert in the history of traditional Chinese landscape painting and will help shape the theoretical framework within which the artistic production will be situated. Professor Wei will visit the University of Alberta in October 2019 to help shape the relationship between our initial research questions and the experimental artistic production, ensuring that multiple disciplinary perspectives contribute to the form and content of these image-based. Professor Wei will produce the primary catalogue essay that accompanies the artistic production and situates our efforts within a contemporary Chinese epistemology. Finally, Professor Wei will also be responsible for organizing the exhibition of this artwork at the ZZULI Art and Design Gallery in February of 2020, which will be accompanied by public presentations at the university.

Yuan Zhang, PhD, (contributor) is an associate professor in the School of Fine Arts, GuangXi Arts University, China. Her research focuses on art history of the modern era in Europe and America, art theory and criticism in the United States after the Second World War, and contemporary visual culture in China. Yuan Zhang has published several essays in China about modernity and American art criticism. She is currently a visiting scholar at the University of Alberta. Her essay will focus on contemporary Chinese understandings of Modernism and how they have shaped the country's process of industrialization.

New Hire (contributor) The Department of Art and Design at the University of Alberta is in the process of hiring a new aboriginal scholar in the History of Art, Design, and Visual Culture. Ideally, this individual will contribute an essay representing an Aboriginal perspective (a necessary condition to achieve a more complete view of the environmental situation).

Siobhan Angus (contributor) will contribute an essay to the catalogue that provides a contemporary Canadian perspective on the nature, scope, and extent of environmental crises of the Anthropocene. Her research examines the intersections of labour and environmental history in 20th century Canada. Her work has been published in Radical History Review and Studies in Art Education. She has delivered juried presentations at conferences in Europe, South America, Canada, and the US.

Proportions of 100%

Thomas 40%

Zheng 25%

Wei 15%

Contributors 10%

GRA's 10%

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This project will be the primary focus of my research activity (approximately 85% of my research time) during the time specified.

## **Roles and Training of Students**

### **ROLES AND TRAINING OF STUDENTS**

I will work with an MFA in the Painting program (Daisy Jin) who will receive professional training in the research-creation methodology. She will have several learning opportunities over the course of this two-year project:

- helping to design the project in terms that embed the creation of the artworks within the research process. This includes participating in the literature review and acting as a studio assistant, which helps to build capacity as a practicing artist-researcher.
- gaining experience and training as an artist assisting with an international exhibition exchange. Daisy will work as an integral part of a collaborative international research network. This includes travelling with me to Zhengzhou to work with Professors Zheng Beizheng and Hua Wei on the production of artworks.
- learning how to structure her own artistic production to situate it critically within scholarly research
- experience with exhibition installation and logistics
- experience presenting at an academic conference
- acting as an intermediary and translator with Professors Hua Wei and Zheng Beizheng, and with the Chinese team members, as Daisy is fluent in Mandarin. This is a key facilitation role that contributes to organizational and networking skills, as well as capacity in collaboration.

During the first trip to China, we will review preliminary pictorial results, exchange ideas and designs and material methodologies. Under my supervision on Daisy will gain technical knowledge working within pictorial ideation and material traditions of Chinese ink painting during this trip. For the remainder of the first year she will assist me in my studio in the production of paintings and drawings as well as an interpreter and intermediary between Zheng Beizheng's studio output and my own.

In Feb 2020, Daisy will again accompany me to Zhengzhou to assist in the installation and presentation of artworks in an exhibition at the ZZULI Department of Art and Design Gallery. This exhibition will travel to Edmonton for exhibition at the University of Alberta FAB Gallery in May of 2020. Finally, she will assist me in the creation of a paper presentation for the 2020 University Art Association Conference. She will also attend the conference to present her own paper, which will build her capacity as an artist-researcher in her own right.

In Year 2, a second RA will be hired (MDes candidate) to design and organize a catalogue of the project, which will include reproductions of the image-based work along with critical essays produced for the project. This student will also design and produce a website for the project and undertake digital promotion of the project and its associated events. In addition, this RA will assist me with the design, layout, and installation of the exhibition at the FAB Gallery, as well as logistics and hosting of Chinese team members during their May 2020 visit.

Both students will receive credit for their labour as co-producers and will be able to include all activities they participate in on their professional CVs.

## **Knowledge Mobilization Plan**

### **KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION PLAN**

This timely project will have broad appeal for diverse audiences in both Canada and China. While I divide audiences into discrete categories below, in fact, much overlap exists between these groups.

Academic audiences and artist-researchers

- Several critical analysis papers and a conference presentation: Papers will be published in top-tiered art journals in both English and Mandarin, such as The Journal of Zhengzhou University of Light Industry
- Personal information will be stored in the Personal Information Bank for the appropriate program.

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(Social Science Edition) .The RA and I will present this research and its outcomes at the University Art Association of Canada conference in 2019.

- Artist talks: We will present our work in public lecture at both host universities' Departments of Art and Design. In Edmonton we will present at an additional forum for international students in conjunction with the China Institute, and in Zhengzhou at the Eastern International Art College. These talks will be publicized to the Chinese-Canadian and visual arts communities in Edmonton.
- Catalogue: This will include reproductions of the artworks made for the project, five scholarly essays and ISBN will be distributed to Art Libraries at Post Secondary Universities in Canada and China.
- Website: This will ensure digital availability of our research questions, research process and creative methodology, and artists' production. Hosting costs will be minimized through the use of a Wordpress site.

Visual arts communities in Canada and China, and wider publics in both countries

In addition to artist talks that present the project results publicly at both the University of Alberta and the Zhengzhou University of Light Industry, we will hold several exhibitions of the artworks created during the project:

- FAB Gallery on the U of A campus
- Department of Art and Design Gallery at the Zhengzhou University of Light Industry
- Rainbow Art Gallery, an avant garde commercial art and performance space in Zhengzhou.

## Expected Outcomes

### Scholarly Benefits

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**Indicate up to three scholarly benefits of the proposed project. (required)**

1. Enhanced research collaboration
2. Knowledge creation/intellectual outcomes
3. Student training/skill development

### Summary of Expected Scholarly Outcomes

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Project will facilitate the development of a research network between the Zhengzhou University of Light Industry and The University of Alberta. Its design employs digital technology and studio/lab activity to allow researchers to conduct prolonged collaborative research.

Project will present new ways of conceiving the landscape and human activity in nature through a combination of hybrid images and scholarly writing. Project makes a claim for the intrinsic presence of a research component in all traditional media-based artistic production that aims to produce critically informed work through material knowledge and experimentation.

Two graduate research assistants will create artworks addressing specific research questions and gain experience in the planning and production of an international exhibitions while working on a collaborative artist-team of researchers.

Numerous undergraduate students will benefit from artist talks in conjunction with exhibitions.

### Societal Benefits

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**Indicate up to three societal benefits of the proposed project.**

1. Enriched public discourse
2. New or enhanced collaborations, partnerships
3. Cultural outcomes

### Summary of Expected Societal Outcomes

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Project will engage and interest multiple publics. It will harness Canada's strength and innovation within the arts, employing innovative form and content in traditional mediums to pose important questions and focus public attention on pressing ecological concerns.

Project will create new connections between Edmonton's Chinese-Canadian audience and its visual arts community.

Project will create new partnerships between Edmonton and Zhengzhou visual art researchers, The U of A China Institute, and University of Alberta's Faculty of Arts with the Zhengzhou University of Light Industry.

Project will result in art exhibitions and public lectures creating opportunity for Canadians to connect with the global landscape and consider the implications of Chinese and Canadian inter-cultural and economic relations moving into the 21st century.

## Audiences

<b>Indicate up to five potential target audiences for the proposed project.</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Academic sector/peers</li> <li>2. Artist-researchers</li> <li>3. Postsecondary students</li> <li>4. Para-public institutions (e.g., museums, libraries)</li> <li>5. General public</li> </ol>
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## Summary of Benefits to Potential Target Audiences

Project will situate artist-researchers working in traditional media within SSHRC's research-creation terminology, creating a strong example of studio practice situated methodologically within research questions. SSHRC's designation of funding to artists as research-creation has generated lively debate as academics put forward a variety of definitions and explanations for what this hybrid term means.

Benefits to post-secondary students in Canada and China include increased global and environmental awareness, and a model for the production of artworks that claims agency in addressing the challenges we face today.

The production of exhibitions and a catalogue will allow this work to be disseminated at the local level as well as distributed to university art libraries in both countries.

The general public will benefit from the work this project will accomplish presenting the arts as a vital realm for engagement with our social, environmental, and economic challenges.

## Funds Requested from SSHRC

### Year 1

<b>Personnel costs</b>			
<b>Student salaries and benefits/Stipends</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Justification</b>
<b>Undergraduate</b>			
<b>Masters</b>	1	\$12,709.00	One MFA graduate student for a 9 hours/week research assistantship for two of the three four-month terms (fall & winter). MFA student will

be actively involved in creative design and execution of artworks, logistics and hosting of Chinese research collaborators, and participate in presentations and communications with research network in China in Year One of project. Rates are based on the 2017- 2018 UofA negotiated rates for Masters level salary and benefits.

**Doctoral**

**Subtotal** **\$12,709.00**

**Non student salaries**      **Number**      **Amount**      **Justification**

**Postdoctoral**

<b>Professional/Technical Services</b>	1	\$2,500.00	Digital printing on ink jet compatible canvas and and fine art paper will be necessary as compositional ideas are exchanged online. \$2500 will cover the cost of production, allowing a practical solution to the geographical barriers faced by the team while allowing collaborators to experiment with different combinations of digital and traditional media and mark making.
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**Other**

**Subtotal** **\$2,500.00**

**Travel and Subsistence Costs for Research**      **Number**      **Amount**      **Justification**

<b>Applicant/Team Member(s)</b>	3	\$5,410.00	Roundtrip airfare (\$2930)for Professors Beizheng and Wei's research visit to University of Alberta campus in October 2018 includes 5 nights each at the Campus Tower Suites Hotel (\$1880) located next to university campus, and five days per diem (\$60/day for 5 days x2). Purpose of travel is collaborative research. Roundtrip airfare for Principal applicant's flight from Edmonton to Zhengzhou in February 2019.Purpose of travel is collaborative research.
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<b>Student(s)</b>	1	\$1,358.00	Roundtrip airfare for MFA research assistant's flight from Edmonton to Zhengzhou in February 2019. Purpose of travel is collaborative research. Research assistant's language capability will insure consistently effective communication as I can not speak Chinese and my collaborators have varying levels of English (spoken and comprehension).
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**Subtotal** **\$6,768.00**

**Travel and Subsistence Costs for Dissemination**      **Number**      **Amount**      **Justification**

<b>Applicant/Team Member(s)</b>		
<b>Student(s)</b>		
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	
<b>Other Expenses</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Justification</b>
<b>Supplies</b>		
<b>Non-disposable equipment</b>		
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>\$0.00</b>	
<b>Grand total year 1</b>	<b>\$21,977.00</b>	

**Year 2**

<b>Personnel costs</b>			
<b>Student salaries and benefits/Stipends</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Justification</b>
<b>Undergraduate</b>			
<b>Masters</b>	2	\$21,182.00	One MFA (9hrs/wk) and one MDes (6hrs/wk)research assistantships for two of the three four-month terms (fall & winter). MFA will be involved in creative design and execution of artworks, logistics and hosting of Chinese research collaborators, and participate in exhibitions and communications with research network in China in Year Two of project. Mdes will assist in production of catalogue and website. Rates are based on the 2017- 2018 UofA negotiated rates for Masters level salary and benefits
<b>Doctoral</b>			
<b>Subtotal</b>		<b>\$21,182.00</b>	
<b>Non student salaries</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Justification</b>
<b>Postdoctoral</b>			
<b>Professional/Technical Services</b>	1	\$7,500.00	Exhibition production costs: \$7500 to stage, advertise, and host exhibition (FAB Gallery, University of Alberta). Includes the cost of framing artwork, installation and materials, advertising and hosting reception
<b>Other</b>	1	\$10,000.00	Production costs for catalogue of project artworks and scholarly essays. Price based upon cost of previous production of a catalogue of similar

scope at the University of Alberta McCallum Press.

<b>Subtotal</b>		<b>\$17,500.00</b>	
<b>Travel and Subsistence Costs for Research</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Justification</b>
<b>Applicant/Team Member(s)</b>			
<b>Student(s)</b>			
<b>Subtotal</b>		<b>\$0.00</b>	
<b>Travel and Subsistence Costs for Dissemination</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Amount</b>	<b>Justification</b>
<b>Applicant/Team Member(s)</b>	1	\$2,588.00	Principal applicant Round trip airfare from Edmonton to Zhengzhou (\$1358) for exhibition of creative research in May of 2020. Travel to present research at UAAC conference in October 2019 (location has yet to be announced). Price of travel (\$1230) based upon UofA maximum for travel within Canada, includes airfare (\$750), \$60 per diem for (3 days \$180), and hotel for 2 nights (\$300)
<b>Student(s)</b>	1	\$2,588.00	Graduate assistant Round trip airfare from Edmonton to Zhengzhou (\$1358) for exhibition of creative research in May of 2020. Travel to present research at UAAC conference in October 2019 (location has yet to be announced). Price of travel (\$1230) based upon UofA maximum for travel within Canada, includes airfare(\$750), \$60 per diem for (3 days \$180), and hotel for 2 nights (\$300).
<b>Subtotal</b>		<b>\$5,176.00</b>	
<b>Other Expenses</b>		<b>Amount</b>	<b>Justification</b>
<b>Supplies</b>			
<b>Non-disposable equipment</b>			
<b>shipping</b>		\$6,500.00	International shipping of artworks into China requires the manufacture of special crates that meet legal and practical material specifications, securing and ATA Carnet from the Canadian Chamber of Commerce will makes it possible for artworks to enter China without complex duties and taxes on Fine Art, and the cost of air freight. Price is based on my previous experience shipping crated artwork to Zhengzhou University of Light Industry.

<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>\$6,500.00</b>
<b>Grand total year 2</b>	<b>\$50,358.00</b>
<b>Grand total</b>	<b>\$72,335.00</b>

## Funds from Other Sources

You must include all contributors (e.g., individuals, not-for-profit organizations, philanthropic foundations, private sector organizations) that are providing contributions for the project. Indicate whether or not these contributions have been confirmed.

If a funding source is not listed, you must:

- (a) type the source name in Funding Source
- (b) identify the contribution type
- (c) enter an amount.

If you have received, from a single funding source, more than one contribution of the same type (e.g., cash) and confirmation status, you must combine these into one entry (e.g., two \$20,000 confirmed cash contributions from a university become one \$40,000 confirmed cash contribution).

For examples of Canadian and international sources of eligible cash and/or in-kind support, see [SSHRC's Guidelines for Cash and In-Kind Contributions](#).

**Note:** All contributions must be indicated in Canadian currency.

Funding Source	Contribution Type	Confirmed	Year 1	Year 2	Total
Department of Art and Design	In-kind	No		\$5,000.00	\$5,000.00
Details	This represents the cost of installation and maintenance of an exhibition at the University of Alberta's Department of Art and Design Gallery to be held in Winter of 2020.				
China Institute, University of Alberta	Cash	No		\$2,500.00	\$2,500.00
Details	Funds for hosting Zheng Beizheng and Hua Wei during their October 2018 and May 2020 visits to the University of Alberta. The China Institute's mandate is to support and enhance research on Chinese energy policy, politics, economy, social issues, culture and Canada-China relations. I met with the Interim Director Jia Wang to discuss this project and received encouragement and an offer of assistance as the project develops.				
Kule Institute for Advanced Research	Cash	No	\$2,000.00		\$2,000.00
Details	Kule Institute for Advanced Research supports interdisciplinary and collaborative research in the social sciences, humanities and fine arts, focusing on research with the potential for national or international recognition. Their Dialogue Grant program is designed to help researchers form teams by meeting in person and I have received support from them				

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Funding Source	Contribution Type	Confirmed	Year 1	Year 2	Total
	previously to bring collaborators to campus for project planning and design work.				
Zhengzhou University of Light Industry	Supplement	No	\$8,000.00		\$8,000.00
Details	Zhengzhou University of Light Industry will pay for hotels, ground transportation, and food for me and the MFA GRA during our October 2018 and February 2020 visits to China. Based on financial support during my 2016 visit to Zhengzhou and an invitation to return in three years for a second iteration of that project.				
University of Alberta		No	\$7,500.00		\$7,500.00
Details	University of Alberta Presidents Fund for the Creative and Performing Arts: Grant funds for the studio production of artworks between Edmonton and Zhengzhou. Includes materials and fees for large scale scanning, digital printing, as well as rental of suitable studio production space.				
Grand total					\$25,000.00

## Reviewer Exclusion

### Excluded Reviewers

Exclusion Type	Family Name / Collaboration	First Name	Initials	Organization	Department	Email
No records to display.						

***OBJECTIVES: RESEARCH CREATION IN CANADA AND CHINA***

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It is widely acknowledged that we currently face a host of environmental challenges due to climate change, and that the origin and scale of these problems will require new ways of thinking about human resource consumption and the environment (Parra & Walsh 2016, Szeman et al. 2015). These problems are global in scale, prompting a collaborative Canadian and Chinese working group of artists and writers to find new creative solutions and pathways forward. Painting has played an important role in both cultures as a way to reflect on humanity's relationship with the natural world (Elkins 2010). Within the context of these concerns, this research-creation project will thus **investigate cultural attitudes towards nature through the lens of landscape painting traditions in China and Canada.**

Research-creation requires those working in the visual arts to interweave theory and practice, which is a means to meet the ongoing mission of the visual arts to enhance our understanding of contemporary social and political issues. Pictorial representation constructs and conveys ideas differently from those arrived at through writing and language alone—and thus it can lead to different experiences and understandings of nature and culture (Sullivan 2005). As well, artists tend to be located outside the dominant practical value system of their culture and are therefore well situated to question, suggest alternative solutions to pressing problems, and produce new knowledge and innovative solutions (Lee 2015). We pose questions, and within the material processes of studio production we are able to both seek their answers and locate new questions (Dame-Seidler 2012). This particular collaborative, interdisciplinary investigation will **combine Chinese and Canadian material knowledge to create new perspectives and art-forms that engage these urgent environmental problems and shared state interests, as well as the historical centrality of the pictorial arts in both cultures.**

Several research and material objectives will direct this project:

- To investigate what constitutes a contemporary landscape, by thinking and experimenting beyond a traditional binary conception of nature and culture
- To create a series of paintings with collaborating artist-researcher Zheng Beizheng, by employing material processes of our countries' respective pictorial traditions
- To reflexively observe and document the intercultural transmission of ideas and experiences that shape the collaborative language-based and pictorial representations
- To interrogate and communicate the theoretical and material aspects of the art production, through a catalogue of the artworks and scholarly essays by art historians Hua Wei and Nicole Zhang.

As part of knowledge mobilization, and as an intrinsic component in visual art research and practice, we will exhibit these artworks in Chinese and Canadian venues. The aim is to engage both communities in collaborative dialogue and intercultural awareness around environmental issues.

***VISUAL ART RESEARCH: CULTURE AND NATURE***

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Art reflects the time and place of its maker, as artists are situated within particular societies (Leavy 2009). Further, culture is an open-ended construct in which meaning is elusive and unstable. It is an ongoing discursive process that changes depending on how a society's members understand its artifacts and symbols, which they both influence and are influenced by daily (Lee 2015). As McEvilley (1993) noted, human nature does not exist outside of time: we are, each of us,

penetrated by our times and our geography, in a reciprocal relationship of developmental influences. Thus, the natural environment provides a setting for cultural processes and belief systems to develop and the landscapes that are subsequently produced form a diverse social and geographical archive of human endeavour (Pretty et al., 2009).

As a medium, painting today is capable of delivering speculative visual representations that function within the aesthetic, cognitive, and ethical realms (McEvelley 1993), and can engage these questions of how culture and nature intersect. Additionally, in our digital age, the artworld is no longer hegemonically centred in one or two major North American cities (Abadine 2017, Schwabsky 2002). It is diffuse and radically more inclusive, as information travels quickly, and images and ideas are circulated and exchanged without the previous geographical/spatial impediments. Serial survey publications like *Vitamin P* (2002, 2011, 2016) have posited painting as a global activity and make it possible to speculate about global patterns of intention, similarity, and difference across cultures and borders. They have also created a narrative that binds practitioners together, providing context through the identification of certain conceptual touchstones (Schwabsky 2002, 2005).

Among these shared concerns, narrative and storytelling are currently being privileged in various ways. This is evident in the return to figuration as a common subject and theme, and in the intense interest in the global proliferation of images telling stories about our precarious environment and related disasters, as well as about recent political history (Mullins 2006). Similarly, diverse cultures value nature in different ways; they therefore have idiosyncratic connections to their natural environment. Intercultural exchange both maintains diversity and strengthens resilience in the face of our present environmental instability. The distinct material processes that constitute painting provide artists with an effective means to understand such complex cultural constellations (Joselit 2009).

### ***VISUAL ART RESEARCH: DIVERSE GEOGRAPHIES***

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Western and Eastern approaches to the natural world reveal overlapping perspectives. Western romantic conceptions of the sublime can be seen in Kant's acknowledgment of the immeasurability of nature, reflected in the work of painters like Constable, Turner, and the Friedrich. In Eastern philosophy, Daoism recognizes the insignificance of the individual in the face of the Cosmos, which is embodied in classic *shan shui* landscapes, for example, which are typically brush and inks works rather than oil paintings. These two perspectives offer an appropriate starting point for the pursuit of a new intercultural vocabulary and narrative to explore global artistic approaches to landscape and the environment.

The place where reason finds its limits (Kant's Sublime) may also be the place where the hegemony of the sciences and the rationality of progress can be countered. Moore suggests in *Capitalism in the Web of Life* (2015), that the binary of "society" and "nature" is a root cause of current environmental crises, intellectually and politically, because the economy and the environment are not independent of each other. Thus, capitalism is not simply a social system, but a way of organizing nature that relies upon the accrual of ecological debt for its continuing expansion (Foster et al. 2010). The programmatic vision of Modernity casts the city's concentration of natural resources and labor as a distinct spatial expression of the Nature/Culture mindset (Kaika 2005). Both notions of Modernity and the City will be key sources of visual imagery for this project's re-evaluation of cultural landscape themes. "To challenge the dualistic framing of the world we must build an alternative to the Cartesian logic of dualism [that] requires

new methodological procedures, narrative strategies, and conceptual language all at the same time.” (Moore, p. 2)

Perhaps landscapes must now be re-thought in light of the need to replace the epistemologically dualistic nature/society split with a new set of images that represents a holistic interdependence between the two. This reframing is necessary to counter to the notion of mastery over nature and address current crises arising from its manipulation to meet market needs. What does a contemporary landscape painting look like reorganized and cast in these terms? If humanity is understood as unified with nature, and resource management and development is a coproduction rather than an *acting upon*, what becomes of deeply felt binaries like city/country and natural/artificial? **This project will question these entrenched binaries by means of a cross-cultural, collaborative production, making images that combine Western oil paint and Chinese ink drawing.**

The subject matter will be drawn from Alberta and Henan Province, from inside and outside the cities of Edmonton and Zhengzhou. We are motivated by the question of where the natural world ends and the cultural one begins. **Is there a point that the city begins? Or a place just outside of it where nature begins?** These are questions my research and prior visual artwork flirted with before, but did not take up so directly. My recent paintings combined elements of the Alberta winter landscape with imagery from the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. I used oil paint to represent imagined spaces that situate the importance of water within dramatically shifting temperatures and climates. As the only major North American city to have been completely destroyed by a severe weather event—and which remains particularly susceptible to further degradation from rising sea levels and the industrial erosion of its natural wetlands buffer—New Orleans is uniquely important to our understanding of climate change in the present and the future.

This prior research and production sets the stage for this new project, suggesting possibilities for its form, ambition, and intent. Almost all people acknowledge the severity of the environmental problems we face, as ours is an evolving situation with no precedent that can be used to predict timelines and ultimate degrees of severity. While scientific methods and empirical positivist thinking have allowed us great advances in medicine, technology and attendant increases in quality of life, such epistemologies are also inextricably linked with our current predicament (Plumwood 2002, Sullivan 2005). The intent with this project is to engage these concerns by combining two distinct cultural perspectives to create new knowledge within a speculative, pictorial realm.

### ***FEASIBILITY AND METHODOLOGY***

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As a visual artist, pictures constitute the results of my research. They are ultimately constructed through the material processes of art-making, but first require the development of ideas through investigation of specific written and visual resources. In this project, we will meet our objectives by employing an innovative methodology that interweaves the production of visual art and scholarly writing to explore the similarities and differences in the evolving Canadian and Chinese attitudes towards nature and our shared environmental challenges. This project builds on my network with artists and scholars in Zhengzhou, which in turn grew out of my association with Professor Wei Hua in 2015, when she was a visiting scholar at the University of Alberta.

Our interaction led to the Zhengzhou University of Light Industry (ZZULI) holding a survey exhibition of my paintings and drawings in November 2016. During my 10-day visit, I delivered public presentations at two universities, visited four undergraduate art classes (conducting

extensive three-hour group critiques with the aid of an interpreter), and was introduced to various professional members of the visual arts community—all of which contributed to my growing network in Zhengzhou. While there, I was also struck by the stunning pollution and landscape of Zhengzhou. There must be five hundred skyscrapers currently under construction in this provincial capital of ten million people. Environmental issues are not just an abstract idea for people in this region.

This project will unfold in three stages, as follows:

### **STAGE 1: INITIAL MEETING AND LITERATURE REVIEW (OBJECTIVE 1)**

**Meeting.** Professors Zheng Beizheng and Wei Hua will visit the University of Alberta in October 2018 for collaborative meetings to discuss in detail our methodology, theoretical structure of ideas, and the relationship between our research objectives and material processes. For example, we will reach an understanding about our parameters and definitions of “the landscape.” Given the intercultural, collaborative nature of this proposed project, this is an important opening step to establish an effective working relationship, clear communication, and a shared understanding.

Beizheng and I are experts in the material processes of our respective landscape painting traditions. We will compose and develop images together on canvas and mulberry paper (the traditional support for Chinese shan shui ink landscapes), combining traditional materials and techniques (i.e. oil paint and mediums, water-based ink wash with brush and stylus) with digitally printed elements that will later enable the exchange of pictorial ideas between Edmonton and Zhengzhou. This studio collaboration can’t be accomplished remotely, through Skype for instance, as both cultures’ art-making traditions are deeply rooted in material process, and we will be learning from each other during this hands-on, experimental phase. I will distribute the results of this collaborative session to all contributing scholars so they can assess our results in relation to initial objectives and suggest possible modifications to methodology to better situate our artistic production within theories at the intersection of social ecology and contemporary art.

In addition, the visiting professors will meet with Director of the University of Alberta China Institute. Their presence on campus will offer a host of interesting benefits to the large body of Chinese students (about 12% of the total undergraduate population) enrolled in the Faculty of Arts at the University of Alberta. In addition to strengthening cultural and institutional ties, their visit will engage students, encourage interest, and develop awareness of our project at this early stage of its development.

**Literature review.** An MFA graduate student (Daisy Jin) will assist with a literature review of contemporary scholarship on “physical” and “social” geography. We will first critically assess dominant socio-cultural models in our respective countries, focusing on the roots of the environmental crises to rethink the nature/culture split through painting. We will examine similarities between the 18th century Sublime and Daoist conceptions of nature. Another area of interest is the shifting site of the Sublime. Nature has been increasingly harnessed by a technological environment or milieu that has replaced it as the main site for the profound experience of the limits of human understanding (Jameson 1991, de Mul 2013).

### **STAGE 2: COLLABORATIVE ART PRODUCTION (OBJECTIVE 2 & 3)**

**Step 1.** After the initiating processes are complete, we will gather source material for construction of collaborative paintings and drawings. Professor Zheng and I will experiment with methods of

formal organization while considering recent relevant pictorial models such as Yun-Fei Ji's *Three Gorges Dam Migration* and Sandow Birk's *Prisonation*. Working serially, and through the introduction of contemporary subject matter, these artists have employed traditional landscape motifs to create images that present new perspectives on complex contemporary social content.

**Step 2.** Here, we will experiment with modifying of each other's pictorial ideas. Each artist will develop five compositions in ink or oil paint. We will then photograph each artwork and exchange image files via internet. Once I have received Beizheng's compositions, I will print them to scale digitally on archival canvas and fine art paper and begin working on this "digital ground" to further develop these hybrid artworks. This is a key aspect of the collaborative process as we envision the final pieces as jointly created, rather than the output of us each as individual artists.

**Step 3.** In February of 2019, my research assistant and I will visit the Zhengzhou University of Light Industry for one week. I will bring the artistic results of our collaboration thus far, so we can return each other's original compositions. We will experiment further with the development of these artifacts, working together in the studio and moving towards their collaborative completion. We will discuss our progress with Professor Wei and the results of this intensive studio session will be sent in digital format to all project collaborators for feedback.

### Stage 3: Documentation and Exhibition (Objective 3 & 4)

**Critical analysis.** While Professors Zheng and I are working collaboratively on art production, our collaborators and research assistants will complete four scholarly essays and exchange them for translation—all completed by the end of the summer of 2019. Professor Hua Wei will translate English essays into Mandarin Chinese and Professor Nicole Zhang will translate Mandarin essays into English so that each essay in the catalogue can be included in both languages. These essays will explore the praxis by which our hybrid images intersect current theories of social ecology and socially engaged art projects. They will be published both in scholarly journals and on the website, and a selection of them will be included in the project catalogue.

**Project Catalogue.** By the end of the Fall semester of 2019 all collaborative artworks will be complete. An MDes research assistant from the University of Alberta will assist with the design and production of the project catalogue and a website to make information available to interested publics. The project catalogue will be published in January of 2020, in advance of two international exhibitions of work created for the project.

**Exhibition of collaborative artworks.** In February 2020, the MFA research assistant and I will travel to Zhengzhou to attend the exhibition opening, and various other events related to the project. Similarly, in April 2020, Professors Zheng and Wei will attend the opening of an exhibition of these artworks at the FAB Gallery on the University of Alberta campus. I anticipate the attendance and support of this event by Edmonton's Chinese-Canadian and visual arts communities, students from the University of Alberta, the Director and Staff of the China Institute, as well as administrators from the university who have set China as a priority collaborative partner.

**Website development.** The MDes research assistant will continue to develop website as well as assisting in the design and production of promotional materials and the overall exhibition design. Website hosting and development costs will be minimized by using Wordpress.

## **Timeline**

### **Year One**

#### Fall 2018:

Professors Zheng Beizheng and Wei Hua will visit the University of Alberta campus. Collaborative meetings to discuss methodology, theoretical structure of ideas and the relationship between our research questions and material processes. I will hire one MFA research assistant (Daisy Jin) and who will participate in all facets of their visit as studio assistant for the creation of artistic outputs, assisting with literature review, and logistics and facilitation during their visit. Visiting professors will meet with Director of U of A China Institute.

#### Winter 2019:

Gathering of source material after our first meeting to discuss parameters and definitions of “the landscape.” Experimentation with methods of formal organization: Professor Zheng and I will exchange image files via internet, print them digitally on archival canvas and fine art papers, and begin experimenting with the modification of each others pictorial ideas. In February, my research assistant and I will visit the Zhengzhou University of Light Industry for one week. I will bring the artistic component of our collaboration with me so that we can compare results, return each others’ original compositions, and experiment with a third stage within the collaborative production of the artworks.

#### Spring/Summer 2019:

Scholarly essays will be complete and exchanged for translation. Professor Hua Wei will translate English essays into Chinese and Professor Nicole Zhang will translate Chinese essays into English so that each essay in the catalogue can be included in both languages.

### **Year Two**

#### Fall 2019:

Collaborative artworks complete. I will hire an MDes research assistant to assist with the design and production of the project catalogue and a website to make information available to interested publics. I will mentor MFA research assistant in preparation of a conference paper presentation. She and I will each present papers at the UAAC – AAUC (Universities Art Association of Canada) conference.

#### Winter 2020:

Project catalogue published in advance of exhibitions. In February, MFA research assistant and I will travel to Zhengzhou to attend the opening exhibition of collaborative artworks. Based on my previous exhibition experience there I can assume there will be numerous formal and semi-formal events in celebration of the realization of this project. In April, Zheng Beizheng and Hua Wei will attend the opening of this this exhibition of artworks at the FAB Gallery on the University of Alberta campus. I anticipate the attendance and support of this event by the Director and Staff of the China Institute as well as administrators from the university who have set China as a priority collaborative partner. MDes research assistant will continue to develop website as well as assisting in the design and production of promotional materials and the overall exhibition design.

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Research Creation Supplemental Materials

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