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Work by the Chinese animation artist, Qiu Anxiong. Qiu's latest solo exhibition is taking place at Fosun Foundation in Shanghai until Oct 7. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Setting a dream in motion

Contemporary artist channels his love of picture books and Chinese folklore to tell stories through animation

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As a child, Qiu Anxiong would spend whole days reading picture books at a book rental stall at the side of the street.

It cost no more than 1 fen (less than a cent) to rent a copy, so Qiu could afford to read to his heart's content.

He was born in 1972 and grew up in Southwest China's Sichuan province. Thousands of picture books were published in China during the 1970s and 1980s. They were in black and white, consisting of dozens of pictures, each depicting a scene with short subtitles below.

Qiu was so intrigued by some of the books that he would read them repeatedly.

"At that time, the picture books were drawn by some of the country's best artists, each picture well composed and movements beautifully captured," said Qiu from his studio in an industrial warehouse in Shanghai's Baoshan district.

A fascination with pictures that tell stories stayed with him as he grew up and became a contemporary artist working with animation.

An important figure of the video art field in China, Qiu has held exhibitions in Paris, New York and Sao Paulo, with his creations being collected by institutions like the Museum of Modern Art in New York, the University of Oxford and Kunsthau Zurich.

Qiu's current solo exhibition, *The Mirage of Mountains and Seas*, runs at Shanghai's Fosun Foundation till Oct 7. The event showcases an animation trilogy he created over the past 12 years, titled *The New Book of Mountains and Seas*.

Exhibiting alongside him is Swiss artist Yves Netzhammer with a body of work titled *Refurnishing Thoughts*, featuring minimalistic drawings, installations and video projects. The work occupies the second floor of the Fosun Foundation exhibition hall, which overlooks the Bund.

Netzhammer and Qiu worked together in 2014, when Qiu was invited by the Swiss Arts Council for a three-month residency.

"His drawings are created in a rational and calm way, and yet his imagery is sensitive and surrealistic," Qiu said. "There are things in common between our work, and his creations are based more on personal imagination and experience."



Qiu Anxiong has held exhibitions in Paris, New York and Sao Paulo.

In Switzerland, they worked on a joint project named *Tableau No 1*, featuring drawings of supernatural beings by Netzhammer and characters that Qiu created, alongside texts that tell their stories.

At Fosun Foundation they decided to exhibit together to "place a Chinese and Western artist together in dialogue in the same space", said Jenny Wang Jinyuan, president of the foundation.

"The two employ their respective artistic strategies to express how they understand, imagine and consider urban space and modern life," she added.

An important figure on China's contemporary art scene, Qiu graduated from Sichuan Art Academy. The school nurtured some of China's most successful painters, some of whom taught there for years.

Qiu himself used to study with Chinese artists Zhang Xiaogang and Ye Yongqing, who encouraged students to focus on creative ideas rather than technique.

Qiu went on to study at Kunsthochschule Kassel, a college of fine arts in Kassel, Germany. It was there he turned to animation to realize his dream of telling stories with pictures in motion.

The university placed a strong focus on animation. A graduate won an Oscar in the 2000s. Qiu watched lots of animation from the archives and was greatly inspired by an African artist's work, made simply of charcoal drawings.

The simple approach showed him that animation did not necessarily require a large team and he could single-handedly tackle the whole process to realize his ideas. With a good computer and the right soft-

ware, he also invested in an SLR camera before starting to work.

Qiu was fascinated with the magical creatures depicted in *Shan Hai Jing* (*The Classic of Mountains and Seas*), a 2,000-year-old Chinese book of folklore and ancient customs.

"Imagine a primitive man from thousands of years ago landing in modern civilization, and he would find lots of magic beasts and monsters all around," Qiu said, explaining the ideas behind his animation trilogy.

With this perspective, Qiu depicted giant beasts that drill oil from the ground and iron birds that drop eggs from the sky. It took him more than two years to create the 31-minute animation film, featuring images in the style of Chinese ink art and an allegorical depiction of the energy crisis.

In 2009, he completed the second episode of the series, about the fear and anxiety related to biological disasters.

The third and final part, a 25-minute-long 3D film, came out earlier this year. It depicts the confusion and struggle of modern people in a high-tech world, where the fine line between reality and virtual reality is often blurred.