



Paper Dialogues: The Dragon and Our Stories Continues



Bit Vejle
Xiaoguang Qiao
Emma Reid
Layla May Arthur





The end game

The aspiration is that the Paper Dialogues exhibition will wind its way around the globe in an unbroken and continuous chain. It will take Psaligraphy, the ancient art of paper cutting, to people of all ages and cultures. It is an art form that is magical in its simplicity, as evident in a child's face when she cuts and opens her first paper snowflake, and equally inspiring in its complexity, as evident in the work of the artists who are the masters of this art.

The goal of the project is to contribute to dialogue, understanding and mutual inspiration of culture and history, by presenting an innovative artistic project with the dragon as a common motif. By establishing a worldwide paper dialogue that involves and engages participants, that even goes beyond the actual artistic collaboration, the exhibition will build bridges between countries and become an inspiration for innovation and collaboration based on a tradition and understanding.

The dragons tell their own stories and create a new one together. The other's story seems strange, yet surprisingly familiar. After all, it is just a world between them.

What happens when the paper dragons of the world meet? The meeting will represent the start of a new and much larger conversation – where everyone is invited to participate.

"The collaboration has been a learning process. We haven't been able to talk directly to one another, but we have decoded each other and created a different kind of dialogue. I feel that I have seen his heart – that we look into each other's soul. It has been fantastic to get to know another paper-cutting artist, a different culture and a different country like this".
- Bit Vejle





Where it begins

It all begins when two artists, Bit Vejle (**Bit**) and Xiaoguang Qiao (**Qiao**), reach out between their respective distant lands of Norway and China, each of which has its own tradition in paper cutting. The artists start an incredible collaboration resulting in the initial Paper Dialogues works, followed by exhibitions in China and Norway.

The small British Island of Jersey becomes the next link in the chain when the stunning works are exhibited in Jersey. Bit and Qiao inspire and share their love of Psaligraphy with seven local Jersey artists who then take what they learn into their local community. School children pick up scissors and begin cutting under the guidance of the artists. Two Jersey artists are commissioned to create their own works that becomes part of the story.

And so the Paper Dialogues continue ...

From Norway to China: The artists dialogue begins

It is in early April 2013 when the artists first meet and the Paper Dialogues journey truly begins. Prior to that Bit discovers Qiao's work in the birthplace of her chosen art. She knows immediately that he is the Chinese artist that she wants to collaborate with, if such is possible.

Bit and Qiao have an instant connection with one another at that first meeting in the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. Bit has always wanted to exhibit her own work to a Chinese audience and it seems now that this dream could become a reality. As her memorable day with Qiao in Beijing continues, the two artists develop their ideas of how a collaboration can proceed.

Bit tours the Central Academy with Qiao, seeing the collection of paper-cuts from various regions of China and hearing about Qiao's meetings with the paper-cutting ladies of rural China - the living bearers of this rich cultural heritage.

Qiao and Bit end their day at Qiao's studio. Here they determine that they will each create a large scale artwork where they, by means of the dragon, present their own culture and history to each other and to the audience.

In July 2013 Qiao and his wife visit Norway, travelling through the beautiful landscape and its fjords and finally reaching the Saint Olav Festival, where Bit has a large solo exhibition. This is where Qiao first sees how Bit's paper-cuttings are displayed between glass plates so that they can be viewed from both sides.

There are no other face to face meetings between the two artists until, after many hours of contemplation and cutting, the works are completed. In this way, Bit and Qiao's final dragon works are free to take their own path without restriction.

Bit and Qiao's finished work is first exhibited in Beijing in China in October 2014. The Today Art Museum in Beijing is followed by Liu Haisu Museum in Shanghai. These initial exhibitions are the culmination of many hours of work and an exciting moment for the artists and the team behind the project.

Displaying works of such a delicate nature involves considerable thought and technical input. Bit's seven dragon eggs are suspended from the ceiling in the glass plates that Bit utilises for her paper-cut displays. Qiao's dragon, which is based on a traditional Chinese perception of duality, has its front and backsides displayed in upright acrylic plates.

These methods allow the art to move safely from each exhibition location as the Paper Dialogues - The Dragon and Our Stories voyages around the world.





About the dragons

Bit and Qiao have their initial silent dialogue in China, where scissors are their means of easy communication. Bit longs to be in the homeland of paper cutting and Qiao is captivated by Bit's artistic style, so different from his own. They decide that the mystical creature, the dragon, which has a strong representation in each of their cultures, is to be the symbol that links their works and their lands. Thus the Chinese Dragon and the Nordic Dragon begin their journey as Bit hatches seven intricate white dragon's eggs and Qiao gives birth to a glorious multi-coloured nine-metre long dragon.





Bit Vejle's intricate dragon eggs are viewed at the Paper Dialogues exhibition in the St. Helier Town Hall in Jersey (Image: Holly Smith)



Dragons in Jersey

The Jersey exhibition has a visible impact on the Island with local artists and members of the community engaging in and producing their own paper art. Bit sees an opportunity here and invites ArtHouse Jersey to add Jersey's own paper art to the Paper Dialogues exhibition. This is seen as a truly exciting venture and ArtHouse Jersey commissions two exceptional Jersey artists, Emma Reid and Layla May Arthur to create their own unique paper works to add to the work of Bit and Qaio. The Jersey artists each create their own paper representation of the Island, forming the Islands very own 'dragon'. These works speak of the Island's history and folklore, along with the produce, landscape, traditions and people that make the Island what it is today.





*Pieces of paper-cutting art created by local school-children in Jersey go on to form a giant dragon which is hung in the atrium of the Jersey library. Poet John Henry Falle (*The Storybeast*) led children to create poems and artwork inspired by the dragon.*

A very accessible story

Paper Dialogues is a very accessible exhibition. A dream for curators and visitors alike. The works of the four artists are, quite simply, stunning. The exhibition can, if the community wishes, lead to community outreach projects. Local artists learn and pass on the skills to young and old in schools, homes for the elderly and any other place where creativity enhances lives. In Jersey, for example, the artists, with the help of local school-children and adults, paper-cut their own individual dragon's scales and combined them to create a three dimensional dragon to suspend from the ceiling of the local library.

Bit's dragon eggs and Qiao's dragon then take flight to The Museum for Paper Art in Blokhuis in Denmark and are joined by dragon works by Jersey Artists, Emma Reid and Layla May Arthur. They will soon find their way to the Swedish Institute in Minneapolis in January 2021. Three continents and many paper cutting converts. And, it is hoped, many more as the dialogue expands bringing nations and cultures together.



Bit Vejle

"Paper cutting is almost my entire identity. It has been part of me all my life - since I cut snowflakes as a child. Hardly a day goes by without me cutting."

Bit is that child making her first snowflake. She wants to inspire others to appreciate and perhaps take up this art form. The Paper Dialogues exhibition excites her with the opportunity that it presents to do so.

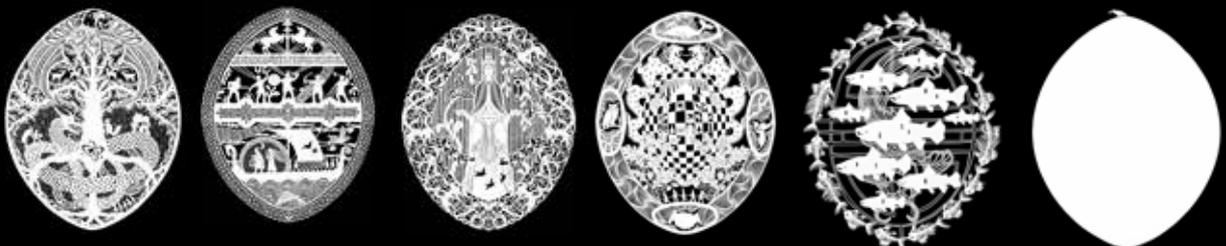
Her Paper Dialogues work is entitled 'Seven Dragon Eggs'

The seven dragon eggs Bit has created for the exhibition are a symbol suggesting both the bringing of new life to psaligraphy and the story of life itself - the past, the present and the future. Bit cuts one large egg and six smaller eggs from simple white paper. Each egg tells a story, one leading onto the next. The stories are all fascinating and depicted in intricate detail in the myriad of Bit's heartfelt cuts. They take us through the past of Norse mythology wherein lies Yggdrasil, the Tree of Life, to the early creation of Norwegian society, to the Viking era and then to the giant egg which portrays Norwegian society as it is today.

The final three eggs represent a focus on future treasures that dragons of the future must protect. The egg of knowledge contains a DNA chain with joining hands, animal and plant life. The next future egg contains a series of fish and fish bones. The fish have images of key holes cut into them. We can then see through to the final egg which is a pure white egg with no cuts. Only the viewer can determine what that future dragon's egg will hold.

Bit is a storyteller as well as a paper cutter. She carries on the tradition of fairy tale writing.

From kids of 4 to 94, who doesn't love a dragon's egg or a giant dragon?







Xiaoguang Qiao

“Traditional paper-cutting became an awakening and an inspiration, both for my cultural awareness and my artistic expression”.

Qiao didn't find the art of paper cutting until after graduating from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. Qiao's work as part of Paper Dialogues, is entitled 'Fish and Dragon Change'

Qiao has created an impressive nine metre long and almost two metres high dragon for the exhibition. "Fish and Dragon Change" is a common traditional ornament in Chinese folk art. It is also a frequently used idiom in Chinese classical literature. It is a metaphor that depicts when things change in their essence. Qiao adopts the metaphoric thinking from folklore paper cuts, and "fish and dragon change" is an analogy describing the major changes that he sees happening in China today. Qiao thinks that the Chinese people are experiencing a civilisation transition that has not happened anywhere in the world since the middle ages.

The work is based in on a traditional Chinese perception of duality, with front and backsides installed in upright acryl plates. On one side Qiao uses traditional motives and places them in an auspicious habitat surrounded by agricultural folklore symbols. On this side the use of black symbolises chaos and renewal. On the other side the artist creates "a dragon of genes". Here Qiao rearranges the seven colours of the rainbow, heralding the rebirth of the dragon and a time of change. He makes the head in the traditional style of the Middle Ages, the tail is a Phoenix tale and the body is the human DNA chain.

Image options: Qiao working at studio or with local artists or (if available Chinese women working on the traditional art - ask prof Qiao)







Emma Reid

Emma is a London-based 3D visual artist and fabricator who works with a multitude of materials ranging from silicone, resin and foam, to leather and even hair.

Emma combines an active life as an artist with a career in creature effects in the film industry, having worked on numerous high profile productions including recent Disney releases 'Star Wars', 'Christopher Robin' and 'Beauty and the Beast'.

'Hoard', the title of her work in the Paper Dialogues exhibition, is her first foray into working with paper.

Inspired by her interest in folklore and fairytale, Emma Reid's Hoard represents her birthplace, Jersey, a small Island located in the Channel Islands, some fifteen miles from the coast of Normandy.

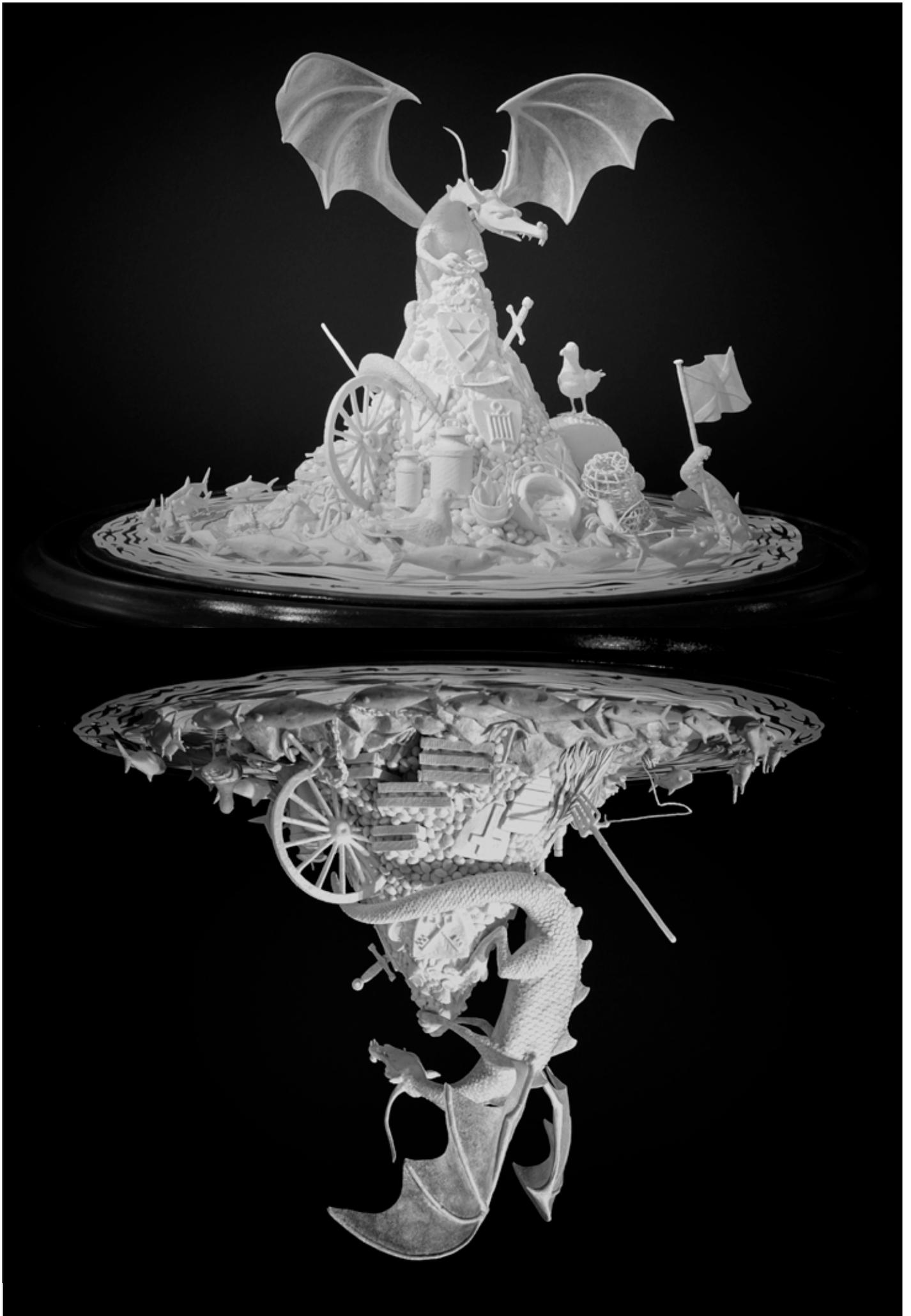
The piece taps into the western tradition of the guardian dragon who, in tales dating back to the middle ages, guards over caves filled with treasure and gold. Adorning the peak of our hoarder's mound are piles of coins, perhaps a wry wink acknowledging Jersey's reputation as a successful finance centre - or simply a nod to the recent discovery in the east of the island of 70,000 Celtic coins.

The dragon stands tall, protective over its caché of coins, while traditional Jersey wares adorn the side of the hill - island produce such as the famed Jersey potato, milk, vraic (seaweed), wool and cider are joined by local delicacies including the donut-like 'Jersey Wonder' and the 'Jersey Bean Crock' casserole. The Parish Crests are dotted across the mound, representing the twelve parishes of Jersey, whose capital parish is St Helier. Of course, Jersey being a rock in the English Channel, it would be impossible to ignore the sea life, who are represented here by playful characters such as the mischievous crab with its bottle of cider, an octopus waving a Jersey flag; elsewhere a lobster scuttles away to escape a lobster pot, and Jersey's indigenous seagulls survey the scene.

Hoard ultimately revels in its playful use of juxtaposition. While one wouldn't normally place an equal value on a bounty of coins with the humble potato or Jersey Wonder, here they are equally prized by the dragon, an acknowledgement of the importance of generations of cultural heritage in comparison with material riches. Emma creates the work with processes she adopts in her day to day work using materials like silicone and resin. The mound is sculpted from pulped toilet paper layered into numerous moulds and dried. Each individual item of treasure is painstakingly sculpted. In keeping with the other works in the exhibition, the more familiar paper-cutting technique is adopted to create the surrounding sea and, swimming in it, the people of Jersey - perhaps the real guardians of Hoard.

In using the guardian dragon Emma continues and develops the dialogue started by Bit and Qaio.

'Hoard' is displayed under a glass dome. It gives viewers the opportunity to peer into the intricate detail of the work from above and all around.





Layla May Arthur

In 2016, Layla May Arthur was one of the Hautlieu school students to visit "Paper Dialogues". She came away from the exhibition in awe and inspired..





Layla has always had a passion for storytelling and narratives, stemming from her love of books. She was inspired to bring knife to paper after discovering the 'Paper Dialogues – The Dragon and Our Stories' exhibition in Jersey. She attended a paper-cutting workshop that Bit and Qiao offered to Jersey students and was hooked on this newly discovered art form.

Ecstatic to be offered the opportunity to exhibit besides the paper artists who first introduced her to the medium, Layla has produced the piece "Jersey; My Childhood Home" adding her voice to the dialogue. Now a fine art student studying in the Netherlands, Layla spent 500 painstaking hours making a circular artwork, encompassing her Jersey dragon, the little green lizard.

Jersey; My Childhood Home takes the viewer on a journey through all twelve parishes on Jersey and Layla's personal adolescent memories of these locations. Distinguished by their separate crests, every parish is represented on their own panel. Guarding the island from overhead is Jersey's miniature dragon, the Jersey green lizard. Many of Layla's memories of Jersey feature the lizard and it has become a catalyst to evoke her childhood memories.

The vertical compositions unravel narrative imagery which extends from one panel into the next, creating a dialogue between parishes. Paper cut patterns of the sea, sky, grass and sand create unity throughout every panel, suggesting to the audience that the fundamental element of life on an island is to be surrounded by the sea.

Layla has become a storyteller with paper since her first encounter with 'Paper Dialogues' and her work has since been exhibited in the International Paper Triennial Switzerland 2020 among other exhibitions. We are immensely proud that "Paper Dialogues" has been such a source of inspiration for a young artist and that it has led her to create works of such detail and complexity so early in her career.

The dragons are touring the world - bringing cultures and people together to reveal both their similarities and their differences.





October 2014
Beijing, China
*The Today Art
Museum*

October 2014
Shanghai
*liu Haisu Art
Museum*

**March to May
2015**
Oslo, Norway
*Vigeland
Museum*

**June to
August 2015**
Trondheim,
Norway
*The National
Museum of
Decorative
Arts & Design*

October 2016
St Helier,
Jersey (UK)
*ArtHouse
Jersey*

**March to
September
2019**
Blokhus,
Denmark -
*Museum for
Papirkunst*

2021-2022
USA
*Precise
dates and
venues TBC*

Future

The Paper Dialogues exhibition is available for touring. Its dragons can travel to any corner of the globe where there is a space available to capture their wonder.

Technical specification

Bit Vejle's white dragon eggs - two crates.

No.1 measures 115x132x34cm and contains the six smaller eggs.
The crate with art weighs 145 kg. Each art work is mounted in hardened glass frames, 0,4 MM. Each weighs 15 kg. and measures 100x80x2 cm. They are to be hung from the ceiling with wire.

No.2 measures 260x186x16cm and contains the big dragon egg.
The crate with art weighs 150 kg. The art work is mounted in plexi glass hard frame 1 cm. The art weighs 100 kg and measures 300*220*3 cm. It is to be hung from the ceiling with wire.

Professor Qiao's 9 m. long dragon

The art is currently transported in a black transportation tube.
It measures, approximately 115x30x30 cm.

The long dragon comes in nine identical pieces, each of which will be encased in a plexi glass frame measuring 190x98cm and around 30kg in weight. New plexi frames for this piece are being purchased in the US and will be available for use thereafter. The total piece is 9 meters long. It is to be hung from the ceiling with wire.

Layla May Arthur

Layla's crate measures 67x72x222 cm and weighs 60 kg.
The work is hung from the ceiling with wire and has a total circumference of 754 cm.
An additional crate is being made that will contain the thirteenth panel, which hangs above the other panels, suspended from the ceiling with wire.

Emma Reid

No. 1 measures 60x69x63 cm and contains the Glass Dome. 10kg in weight.
To stand on floor, on a stand that needs to be sourced by the Gallery.

No. 2 measures 34x54x54cm. Arwork is in black plastic 10kg in weight. Art work The art work is approximately 32 cm. in diameter.

We are looking forward to collaborating with you around this meaningful exhibition project. For more information about this exhibition and to enquire about bookings please contact Tom Dingle, Director of ArtHouse Jersey, on tom@arts.je or call +44 1534 617521

