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Reclaiming the status of marginalised groups
-- combining expanded portraiture, documentary, and VR

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Abstract

This research project explores the innovative combination of expanded portraiture, documentary films, and virtual reality to reclaim the status of Chinese veterans within Chinese society. By integrating diverse forms of expression, including traditional Chinese portrait painting techniques, documentary films and VR installations¹, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the experiences of marginalised individuals, specifically focusing on the marginalised group of veterans of the Kuomintang (KMT) who participated in the Second Sino-Japanese War but became socially and politically marginalised on the mainland due to historical circumstances. Through the creation of a unique and immersive experience for viewers, the project seeks to foster empathy, recognition, and positive perceptions of KMT veterans. By challenging negative portrayals and amplifying their stories, this research contributes to knowledge and understanding of their lives, reshaping societal perceptions, and promoting peaceful coexistence. The project empowers veterans to share their experiences, reclaim their identities, and create their own narratives. Through expanded portraiture, documentary films and virtual reality, this research demonstrates the potential for art and technology to foster understanding, connection, and empathy for marginalised communities. Ultimately, the project highlights and deepens understanding of Chinese veterans and calls for their rightful place and respect within contemporary Chinese society.

¹<https://www.chenqi.art/26-vateren> [Accessed 1 July, 2023].

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Introduction

This research project is an enquiry into how a reclamation of the status of marginalised groups with specific reference to KMT veterans Kuomintang (KMT)² who participated in the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937 - 1945), can be achieved through combining expanded portraiture, documentary and VR. By foregrounding their narratives and employing artistic mediums such as portraiture, documentary film, and virtual reality, this research aims to shed light on their experiences and contributions while addressing the broader significance of marginalised communities in artistic creation.

Traditional portraiture vividly captures the countenances of these veterans. The brushstrokes not only portray their physical features but also aim to convey the depth of their experiences and sacrifices during the Second Sino-Japanese War. Simultaneously, documentary filmmaking serves as a dynamic narrative device, documenting the life trajectories of the veterans. It provides an audio-visual dimension to their stories, fostering a richer understanding of their struggles and contributions.

Displaying these artworks within the historic space where the Japanese surrender was signed adds layers of meaning to the narrative. It symbolically reinstates the veterans' historical significance in a space once marked by geopolitical transitions. In the era of digital accessibility, Virtual Reality (VR) technology becomes a powerful ally. By reconstructing the exhibition space within a VR environment, this research ensures that a global audience can engage with the veterans' narratives. This innovative

² The Kuomintang (KMT) is a Chinese political party that ruled mainland China from 1927 to 1949 prior to its relocation to Taiwan as a result of the Chinese Civil War. The name of the party translates as "China's National People's Party" and was historically referred to as the Chinese Nationalists.

approach transcends physical boundaries, democratizing access to historical narratives and fostering a broader understanding of marginalized communities.

In essence, this critical evaluation elucidates how each artistic medium contributes to the overarching goal of reclaiming the historical status of KMT veterans. The interplay of portraiture, documentary, and VR techniques not only documents the past but also engages with it in a contemporary context, inviting a diverse audience to connect with the stories of these marginalized individuals. Through critical evaluation of the research process and analysis of artistic forms, this study seeks to uncover the transformative potential of artistic expression, fostering empathy, and challenging dominant narratives.

In the first part of this thesis, I embark on a comprehensive exploration of my specific research subject, delving into its multifaceted dimensions, interrogating its intricacies, and critically evaluating the process that has unfolded. The overarching aim of this written critical review is to contribute to the discourse surrounding artistic research, shedding light on its transformative potential and the unique challenges it presents.

My focus centres around the marginalised subject of Chinese veterans of the Second Sino-Japanese War. These individuals, who played pivotal roles in shaping the history of the Chinese nation, have often been overlooked and forgotten. It is my fervent belief that their experiences, struggles, and contributions deserve recognition and remembrance. By foregrounding their narratives, I aim to reclaim their historical place via the lens of artistic practice.

I also present an analysis of artistic forms within the context of World War II and its profound impact on global history, I embark on a critical examination of the artistic

forms that have emerged to represent and engage with this subject matter. Through an in-depth analysis of portraiture, documentary film, and virtual reality, I seek to uncover how these artistic mediums capture the essence of the veterans' experiences and convey their significance in our contemporary society. By closely examining the artistic choices, techniques, and narratives employed in these forms, I hope to unravel the layers of meaning and stimulate a nuanced understanding of the subject.

A pivotal aspect of my exploration revolves around the broader significance of marginalised communities in artistic creation. Art has the power to amplify the voices of those on the margins, challenge dominant narratives, and foster social inclusivity. By interrogating the intersection of art and marginalised communities, I seek to shed light on the transformative potential of artistic expression and its capacity to shape our collective consciousness.

The second part of this thesis involves a critical evaluation of the research process undertaken throughout my journey. As I reflect on the methods, steps, and challenges encountered, I offer insights into the intricacies and complexities of researching marginalised subjects within the context of artistic projects. Additionally, I present proposed solutions and analyse the artistic decisions made, particularly in the documentation of the later years of the Second Sino-Japanese War veterans.

In tandem with the critical evaluation, I assess the effectiveness and impact of employing traditional portraiture, documentary film, and virtual reality techniques in capturing the essence of my research subject. By analysing audience feedback and considering the broader social implications of the project, I strive to evaluate the success and significance of these artistic approaches.

Through this research, I aim to present a comprehensive analysis of the marginalised subject of the Second Sino-Japanese War veterans, while also contributing to the discourse surrounding artistic research and the importance of marginalised communities in artistic creation. By integrating the expressive mediums of traditional portraiture, documentary film, and virtual reality, my project seeks to illuminate the lived experiences of marginalised communities, fostering dialogue, empathy, and the potential for social change.

Section 1

Analysis of the theoretical and historical context of the research subject

Chapter 1 The Second Sino-Japanese War Veterans as marginalised Subjects

World War II stands as the most fiercely fought and deadliest war in human history, leaving behind a trail of humanitarian disasters, tragedies, and indelible trauma for countless families. Works of literature and art inspired by the war have sought to recreate its circumstances and serve as a cautionary tale for future generations, urging them to avoid repeating such a tragedy.

During World War II, the Chinese veterans that are the subject of this research project actively engaged in military combat within the context of China. They were predominantly under the leadership of the Nationalist government, with their primary objective being resistance to the Japanese invasion. This group of veterans played crucial roles in the defence of Chinese territories and contributed significantly to the nation's efforts to counter the aggressions of the Imperial Japanese forces.

After the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, the veterans' trajectories diverged, reflecting varied affiliations with political parties and leaders. Some veterans-maintained connections with the Communist Party of China (CPC), which emerged victorious in the Chinese Civil War³, while others retained

³ The Chinese Civil War was fought between the Kuomintang-led government of the Republic of China and forces of the Chinese Communist Party, with armed conflict continuing intermittently from 1

associations with the Nationalist Party, also known as the Kuomintang (KMT). Their different allegiances during this transitional period influenced their post-war experiences and opportunities in the new political landscape.

The relationship between these veterans and the CPC, under the leadership of Chairman Mao Zedong, was intricate and multifaceted. While some veterans actively aligned with the CPC and continued to serve in various capacities, others had complex experiences with the party, encountering challenges and opportunities that reflected the complexities of post-war China.

Similarly, their interactions with the KMT, which retreated to Taiwan after losing the civil war, were diverse. Some veterans chose to follow the KMT to Taiwan, where they contributed to the development of the Republic of China government, while others remained on the Chinese mainland and adapted to the governance of the newly established People's Republic of China.

August 1927 until 7 December 1949, and ending with Communist control of mainland China. The war is generally divided into two phases with an interlude: from August 1927 to 1937, the KMT–CPC Alliance collapsed during the Northern Expedition, and the Nationalists controlled most of China. From 1937 to 1945, hostilities were mostly put on hold as the Second United Front fought the Japanese invasion of China with eventual help from the Allies of World War II, but even then co-operation between the KMT and CPC was minimal and armed clashes between them were common. Exacerbating the divisions within China further was that a puppet government, sponsored by Japan and nominally led by Wang Jingwei, was set up to nominally govern the parts of China under Japanese occupation. The civil war resumed as soon as it became apparent that the Japanese defeat was imminent, and the communists gained the upper hand in the second phase of the war from 1945 to 1949.

In the post-war era, these veterans experienced various degrees of recognition and social integration. Some received accolades for their contributions, while others faced challenges due to the changing political climate, societal perceptions, and personal circumstances. Throughout my project, I endeavoured to capture the nuanced and diverse experiences of these veterans, acknowledging the complexities of their relationships with different political entities, and tracing their development in the early years of the People's Republic of China. This examination aimed to shed light on the multifaceted identities and historical significance of these special veterans within the context of the Second World War and post-war China.

My decision to create artwork centred around war veterans stems from a personal story within my own family and their connection to World War II.

In the early 1990s, during my primary school years, I was filled with curiosity and vividly remember a particular incident. One day, my mother took me to my grandmother's house, emphasising the importance of the occasion. As I entered, I saw a group of people gathered around my grandmother. Amidst the crowd, an uncle knelt before her, weeping inconsolably, while my grandmother pounded her chest. I faintly heard her utter words like, "My dear brother, I longed to see you every day, but alas, we were denied even that."

Later, my mother revealed the story behind this emotional encounter. The uncle who had travelled all the way from Taiwan in search of his family was my grandmother's brother's eldest son. During World War II, my grandmother's brother and many of his classmates had been deceived and sold to Taiwan for military service by their high school headmaster in 1944, under the false pretence of transferring schools. Those

who refused to comply were executed on the spot, an event known as the Penghu July 13 Incident⁴. When family visits between Taiwan and the mainland resumed in the early 1990s, the eldest son followed the information recorded in a diary and successfully located his ancestral hometown, leading to this tearful reunion.

In 2012, I travelled with my parents to Taiwan to visit my grandmother's brother's family. They took me to a military cemetery to pay tribute to this man who never returned from war. This visit opened my eyes to the existence of numerous other veterans, each with their own unique stories. Their lives became extraordinary memoirs of the war. Inspired by my grandmother's brother, none of these veterans could have fathomed that a separation in 1944 would become an eternal farewell for many of them.

⁴ The July 13 Penghu incident (from Chinese: 七一三澎湖事件) refers to a forced conscription of refugees that occurred during the Republic of China's (ROC) White Terror in 1949. 5000 students and teachers fleeing the Chinese Civil War from Shandong in mainland China were relocated to the Penghu archipelago near the island of Taiwan. The ROC promised that their education would continue while serving as part-time soldiers. Instead, the refugees were made full-time soldiers. Student protests broke out on July 13 and were violently suppressed by the military. Some protesters being stabbed with bayonets, while others were reportedly killed. Some teachers and principals publicly supported the students; some may have attempted to notify higher authorities of the abuses. In response, the military arrested hundreds of students toward the end of July. The prisoners were tortured into false confessions of being communist spies. The supportive teachers and principals were implicated and arrested.



Fig 1. Qi Chen. 2013, *Taiwan Veteran*, 33cm*33cm*64, Ink on paper

In 2013, I returned to Taiwan and visited over sixty veterans, capturing their portraits in ink (Figure 1). Just like my great-uncle, these veterans had experienced unimaginable hardships during the war. Their stories were a testament to the lifelong and indelible impact of war on individual lives.

In 2014, I held two exhibitions of these portraits in Nanjing and Changsha⁵. During

⁵ In June 2014, I held two exhibitions featuring portraits of Taiwan veterans at Nanjing Vanguard Bookstore (Wutaishan Road) and Changsha Youyuyi Art Museum (Dingwangtai Road). In 2013, CNN dedicated a special report to Vanguard Bookstore, praising it as the "most beautiful bookstore in China." In March 2014, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) recognized it as one of the world's top ten most beautiful bookstores. In June 2015, The Guardian, a British newspaper, included it in the

the exhibitions, I had the opportunity to meet various associations that care for veterans, and I gradually learned that many other veterans chose to stay in mainland China after the war against Japan ended. Particularly in the Huaihua area of Hunan Province, there were still some war veterans living in extremely difficult conditions.

To address their needs, I decided to utilise the funds raised from the sale of my books at the exhibition, which amounted to 30,000 Yuan. I used this money to support ten veterans in the Huaihua area, providing each of them with 3,000 yuan, enough to cover their daily expenses for an entire year. The experiences of these veterans in Taiwan and mainland China made me realise the lifelong and indelible impact of war on individual lives. Those who perished in the war sacrificed their youth, while those who survived retired after their service, and many veterans continue to live with the memories of that war.

This experience sparked my concern for more marginalised groups, and I became determined to record more faces and stories through my artwork. In the summer of 2016, I painted dozens of portraits of various ethnic minorities in Xinjiang, China (Figure 2). In 2018, I focused on capturing the faces of residents in the Scottish region of Edinburgh, UK (Figure 3). In 2019, I painted various worshippers in front of the Da Zhao Monastery in Lhasa, Tibet (Figure 4). And in 2020, I depicted the images of new immigrants in Ireland (Figure 20).

list of "twelve most beautiful bookstores worldwide." In August of the same year, Cable News Network (CNN) in the United States selected Vanguard Bookstore among the "coolest bookstores globally." In March 2016, the United States' National Geographic named it one of the world's top ten bookstores, making Nanjing Vanguard Bookstore the only Asian bookstore to receive this honor.



Fig 2. Qi Chen. 2016, *Xinjiang Muslim*, 33cm*33cm, Ink on paper



Fig 3. Qi Chen. 2018, *Portrait in Edinburgh*, 33cm*33cm*36, Ink on paper



Fig 4. Qi Chen. 2019, *Monastery in Lhasa*, 33cm*33cm*64, Ink on paper

The people living in these diverse locations, characterised by their unique cultural beliefs, customs, and habits, have experienced conflicts, disconnections, and even contradictions with their surroundings at different points in history. Although most individuals in society aspire to a peaceful life, the escalation of military and political conflicts can tragically result in separation and loss for those caught during war.

War aims to achieve certain political and economic goals. It represents the highest form of conflictual struggle between classes, nations, states, and political groups, reflecting the violent means by which political objectives are pursued. Evan Mawdsley, Professor of International History at the University of Glasgow, delves into the origins, progression, and subsequent global impact of World War II in his work *World War II: A New History*. Mawdsley elucidates how the roots of the conflict lie in a clash between the established international order and emerging forces, before

meticulously tracing the globalisation of the conflict across Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. Furthermore, he analyses the intricate interplay of political, economic, ideological, and cultural factors that shaped the course of events. The repercussions of the war are also scrutinised, encompassing not only the defeat of the Axis powers but also the dismantling of colonial empires and the commencement of the Cold War era. Mawdsley's comprehensive examination offers insights into the multifaceted dimensions of World War II, illuminating its profound and enduring impact on the geopolitical landscape of the twentieth century (Mawdsley, 2020).

Professor Emeritus at the United States Naval Academy, Craig L. Symonds (2018), in his book *World War II at Sea* pointed out that World War II involved over 60 countries and regions, spanning Asia, Europe, the Americas, Africa, Oceania, and the Pacific, Atlantic, Indian, and Arctic Oceans. It encompassed an area of more than 22 million square kilometres and affected a population of approximately 1.7 billion people, which accounted for 80% of the world's population. The war resulted in the loss of over 50 million lives.

Despite the passage of time, World War II continues to have a profound impact on the world. Local disputes persist in various regions, and political rivalries have intensified. Economic and political interests, global resources, and globalised markets have become focal points of competition between nations. For instance, conflicts over territorial issues have led to the four Arab-Israeli wars, the Kashmir issue between India and Pakistan, territorial disputes between China and neighbouring countries such as Vietnam, the Soviet Union, and India. Notably, the United States, leveraging its superpower status, has been involved in five regional wars in the Middle East, including the Gulf War, the Kosovo War, the Afghanistan War, the Iraq War, and the

Libya War. The Middle East has become a strategic focus for the United States in its efforts to maintain its global dominance.

In the face of such conflicts, we should strive for peaceful coexistence and resolve disputes through dialogue and negotiation. We should learn from the lessons of history, understand the consequences of war, and cherish the hard-won peace that we currently enjoy. By recognising the individual faces and stories affected by war, we can foster empathy, promote understanding, and work towards a more peaceful and harmonious world.

In 2021, I embarked on an art project that intertwined portraiture, documentary film, and virtual reality to capture the stories of the last surviving veterans of the war in Huaihua, Hunan Province. This project focused on Zhijiang, the site of the Japanese surrender in China, where Huaihua was the location of the final surrender of the Japanese army in the Asian theatre of World War II and the Battle of Xuefeng Mountain⁶, the last battle between China and Japan. The region had experienced a national tragedy, with countless individuals fighting together. Even after more than half a century, some of the soldiers who survived this war and witnessed its outcome still reside in the land they swore to defend. My goal was to document their stories so that more people could comprehend the brutality of war and the resilience of life.

World War II marked a significant turning point in world history, altering the lives of many and leaving lasting memories for those who were present. Moreover, it provided

⁶ The Battle of West Hunan (Chinese: 湘西會戰), also known as the Battle of Xuefeng Mountains (Chinese: 雪峰山戰役) and the Zhijiang Campaign (Chinese: 芷江戰役), was the Japanese invasion of west Hunan and the subsequent Allied counterattack that occurred between 6 April and 7 June 1945, during the last months of the Second Sino-Japanese War. Japanese strategic aims for this campaign were to seize Chinese airfields and secure railroads in West Hunan, and to achieve a decisive victory that their depleted land forces needed.

newfound opportunities for individuals who had previously been marginalised or suppressed by society. My research focuses on the Second Sino-Japanese War veterans who actively participated in the Second World War and are now mostly in their nineties. Through my brush and lens, I captured their appearance in the twilight of their lives and explored their perspectives on life.

Chinese veterans made significant contributions during World War II and played a crucial role in the conflict. They fought for justice under harrowing circumstances and endured immense hardships throughout the war. While they emerged victorious, many continue to bear the physical and emotional wounds they sustained during the conflict or later in life due to illness or injuries.

The term "Chinese veterans" refers to individuals who served in either the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) or the Kuomintang (KMT) armies during World War II. China's involvement in the war, which lasted from 1937 to 1945, was a defining moment in the nation's history. During this period, China found itself entangled in both global and domestic conflicts. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP), led by Mao Zedong, fought against other nationalist parties for control of the country. Simultaneously, they engaged in a civil war against the Kuomintang (KMT) led by Chiang Kai-shek, which concluded in 1949 with the CCP's victory and the establishment of their government in Beijing.

Studies on the War of Resistance against Japan (1937-1945) often reflect either a state-centred perspective emphasising the CCP's official history or alternative narratives developed by intellectual elites in post-socialist China. These approaches contribute to the larger narratives surrounding China's role during this period: one

emphasising collective efforts and sacrifice for national unity, and another focusing on individual experiences within militarism and wartime conditions.

Former members of the People's Liberation Army of China (PLA), who are also volunteers in this movement, are dedicated to locating and assisting a group of forgotten KMT veterans who fought against the Japanese invaders during World War II but now live in impoverished conditions. To better comprehend how these veterans have been treated over time and why they have been neglected, it is necessary to examine their experiences during their time of service and upon returning home.

Diamant, Professor of Asian Law and Society at Dickinson College reveals that many veterans faced frequent humiliation and discrimination, despite being officially recognised as essential members of the ruling elite and hailed as integral contributors to the revolution (Diamant, 2008). Unfortunately, few civilians sympathised with their plight for some of the reasons given below. This stands in stark contrast to the treatment received by other World War II veterans who were celebrated as heroes upon their return home.

Chinese veterans of World War II often experienced mistreatment, despite being officially acknowledged as fundamental members of the ruling elite and recognised as the backbone of the revolution. Much of this mistreatment can be attributed to the state's failure to provide veterans with opportunities to organise within fraternal organisations or quasi-autonomous federations (Diamant, 2008). By limiting the establishment of veteran organisations, the government aimed to maintain strict control over social and political activities, ensuring the dominance of the ruling elite. Additionally, it might have been influenced by the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP)

ideological emphasis on the collective and the suppression of individual interests. The party's focus on promoting a unified narrative of the revolution and the sacrifices made by the masses could have discouraged the recognition of individual veterans or the acknowledgment of their distinct experiences. In the present day, these veterans have aged and often live in extreme poverty, facing ostracism and being largely forgotten (Almeroth-Williams, 2021). Understanding their experiences may help to provide a focus on how they should be treated today, and why they are deserving of attention, respect, and potential gratitude for their wartime service. Thus, the focus of this research project is reclaiming the status of Chinese veterans.

My artistic approach primarily involves painted portraiture and documentary filmmaking. Numerous artists and filmmakers have conveyed their understanding of war and human strife through the depiction of their subjects. Portraits and video documentation provide direct ways to present images that resonate with viewers. Whether portraying the persecuted, leaders, ordinary soldiers, or the victorious and defeated, these artists have focused on individual experiences and circumstances since World War II. Similarly, I have used portrait painting and documentary filmmaking, aiming to document the appearance and circumstances of these veterans in detail.

With the advancements in technology, people now have access to extensive knowledge of the world through their computers or mobile phones. Thanks to the application of virtual reality (VR) technology, individuals can fully immerse themselves in experiences like never before. This means that art is not confined to traditional gallery spaces but can be presented anywhere in the world accessible via the internet.

Through the mediums of portraiture, documentary film, and virtual reality, I aim to restore the veterans' prominence. This project has resulted in an interactive multimedia experience that immerses viewers in the lives and experiences of these Chinese veterans during World War II. VR as a medium provides an opportunity for viewers to experience in an embodied way the images represented. The objective is to create an environment where visitors can immerse themselves in a virtual space that represents the individuals within their wartime context, and to make it fully accessible on the world wide web.

Chapter 2 Analysis of Artworks related to World War II

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I present an analysis of three distinct artistic forms as they respond to the events of World War II. In the section dedicated to portraiture, I begin by exploring the unique development and history of portraiture in China, with a particular focus on the rise and decline of traditional Chinese portrait painting techniques. Building upon this foundation, I then delve into a more detailed examination of notable artists and their significant contributions in portraying the aftermath of World War II.

Transitioning to the realm of documentary film, I analyse the works that emerged in the post-World War II era, highlighting their importance in capturing and authentically representing historical imagery. I emphasise the significance of documentary filmmaking in documenting reality and its ability to convey the experiences and perspectives of individuals affected by the war.

Then, I turn my attention to the application of virtual reality in the realm of art. I provide an in-depth analysis of how this technology is utilised within the artistic field and explain the rationale behind its integral role in my own project as a vital exhibition medium. By harnessing the immersive power of virtual reality, I aim to enhance the viewer's engagement and offer a unique and impactful experience.

Concluding the chapter, I offer a synthesis of the three artistic forms, exploring their individual merits, originality, and profound significance. I underscore the reasons for

my deliberate integration of these diverse art forms and provide a thoughtful analysis of their creative innovation and broader significance within the context of World War II representation.

Through this chapter, my intention is to provide a clear and comprehensive overview of the analysis of artworks related to World War II. By examining portraiture, documentary film, and virtual reality, I aim to illuminate the distinct contributions of each artistic form, their historical evolution, and their intrinsic value in shaping our understanding and appreciation of this significant historical period.

2.2 Portraiture

Portrait painting existed in China during the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 220). Extant graphic documents demonstrate that the art of portraiture existed as early as the Han dynasty (Spiro, p. 6). This occurred during a moment in Chinese history when Confucianism was gaining popularity across the country and social position was more important than it had ever been. One way to demonstrate a person's wealth and authority was to have them painted while wearing fine attire and jewellery. This was done so the picture may be displayed.



Fig 5. Unknown Artist. (No date) *Han Women, Dahuting Tomb*

Chinese portrait painting is also recorded from the Han dynasty, but some Pre-Qin Period (before 221 BC) texts show that portraiture was already prevalent in the Yin and Shang dynasties (c. 1600 BC–c. 1045 BC). It was during the Han Dynasty and the time of Gu Kaizhi (c. 344–406) which was a celebrated painter of ancient China that portraiture became the main trend in Chinese painting (Figure 5). There was a Chinese art historian, calligrapher, and painter Zhang Yan Yuan (c. 815–c. 877)'s *Famous Paintings through History*, written in the Tang dynasty (618–907 CE), it is written that “to keep one's spirit, to concentrate on oneself”, “to combine the work of creation”, and finally, “to be the true painting” (Zhang, 1992).

The art form of portrait painting has maintained its unique artistic characteristics through the Tang, Song (960–1279), Yuan (1279–1368), Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1912) dynasties, mostly for the imperial power and nobility or celebrities, to serve as a model for future generations. As China opened to the outside world,

portrait painting created by Chinese artists underwent many changes, as the materials used were no longer limited to traditional ink and wash techniques, and the objects depicted were expanded to include many ordinary people. The definition of the traditional portrait was constantly being expanded by new forms of art.

Freeland (2007) points out that the key aim of portraiture became the depiction of the sitter and to convey his or her 'person-ness'. This was accomplished using different mediums and techniques. This can be seen in the works of European painters like Rembrandt and Titian, who captured moments from the sitters' lives and used those details to emphasise their personhood. This goal could be described as the painter's desire to communicate the subject's distinct essence, character, thoughts and feelings, interior life, spiritual condition, individuality, personality, or emotional complexity (Freeland, 98).

According to English Professor Shearer West (2004), a portrait is typically a work of art that depicts a distinct individual, although this basic definition betrays the portrait's complexity and inconsistencies. She believes that a portrait can not only be concerned with likeness as embodied in a person's physical characteristics, but that it can also represent the subject's position or 'inner life,' such as the subject's character or values. A portrait can focus primarily on likeness as embodied in a person's physical characteristics. For example, during the Renaissance period portraits were often intended to capture an individual's status and rank within society, whereas during the 19th century there was an emphasis on capturing an individual's inner character rather than their outward appearance.

Portraiture is a genre of art that has long been associated with the idea of likeness.

The derivation of the name "portraiture" suggests the genre's relationship with likeness and mimesis. Portraiture depicts a specific individual's likeness, yet that likeness is thought to be a replica or duplication of his or her external features (West 2004, p. 21). This definition is an important starting point for understanding how portraiture can be used as a form of political expression. By expressing likeness through portraiture, artists can capture not only physical characteristics but also personality traits and emotions, which can then be communicated through multiple media forms. According to West (2004), while portraits reflect an individual's likeness, they can also demonstrate the artist's imagination, the sitter's perceived social role, and the attributes of the sitter that elevate him or her beyond the occasion of the moment. She went on to suggest that a sitter's social and cultural background can be reflected in a portrait through the sitter's behaviour norms as well as the creative techniques that are used. As a result of these considerations, the likeness of the subject in the portrait becomes less important than the standard, the customary, or the ideal.

The portrait is a representation of reality, but it is also a representation constructed by someone else - it is an interpretation. The concept of interpretation is fundamental to understanding how portraits are made and how we experience them. Portraits are not simply pictures; they are also interpretations made by artists and viewers alike. A portrait displays subjectivity by attesting to the presence of a specific individual (Freeland 2007, p. 100).

This is evidenced in Chinese portraiture which existed during the Han dynasty. Chinese portraits, according to historian Audrey Spiro (1990) use comparable graphic strategies to express their themes. Portraits from this period were created using ink on

silk, which allowed for a more detailed and accurate depiction of facial features than other materials would have allowed. This made for a lifelike portrait framed as scrolls for viewing by hand in homes or government buildings, where they would serve as a source of inspiration or guidance for those who saw them.

In Cihai (a comprehensive Standard Mandarin Chinese dictionary and encyclopaedia), a portrait is defined as "the unique characteristics of painting, including head image, length portrait group images, which are essential to accomplish the union of form and spirit world." The Chinese scholar Tianyu Liu pointed out this genre is known as vivid portraiture in traditional painting (Liu 2017, p. 1248). This description illustrates that there is a very specific connotation attached to the art of portraiture in China. It is not merely a picture of a person but rather an image of the qualities that make up their character, which is created through the union of the spirit world and the physical world. According to Liu (2017) the widespread acceptance of Chinese portraiture may be attributable to the cultural implications reflected in the art form's distinctive creative aesthetic.

The technology behind portraiture has advanced over time, with a particular emphasis placed on the role that portraiture plays in traditional Chinese society. In addition, artists have been depicting a person's spirit in addition to their personality and appearance by using portraiture techniques that date back to ancient times.

Portrait Artist Koivisto pointed out: "Portraiture art is a study of human existence" (Koivisto, p. 4). One purpose of portraiture is to attempt to capture an individual's character, personality or sense of self. Portraiture has been practised for millennia as a method of recognising or marking the status of significant figures from within a

culture, yet it also serves as a vehicle for artists to convey their own sentiments and ideas regarding the subject.

"Portraiture art may be the closest way to get to the reality of the past or the living human beings, we can see the identity and the character of the sitter in the painting." (Koivisto 2019, p. 4). This is one of the key rationales as to why I have chosen portraiture as a method of reclaiming the status of marginalised groups, particularly the Chinese veterans who fought in World War II, and I explain below how this approach allows me to represent real people who were affected by this war.

During World War II, the Chinese people resisted Japan's imperialist invasion. The main military force on the battlefield at that time was the Nationalist Government led by the Kuomintang. In 1949, the People's Republic of China was established. For many reasons, many soldiers who had been in the KMT army before 1949 did not go to Taiwan but stayed on the mainland. Although they took part in the war against fascism, for political reasons they were KMT. The Communist-led government was for a number of years unable to evaluate their contribution to the war effort positively. Many veterans were imprisoned and interrogated, and their children received unfair treatment in terms of education due to their political status. The experiences and stories of these veterans have also gradually faded from the public eye. In my opinion, these stories deserve more attention, as World War II affected the lives of this particular social group, and these experiences deserve to be brought to the attention of a wider audience. As I am interested in exploring how art can be used to promote social justice, I have chosen to focus on making visible this group of forgotten and marginalised individuals.

In both Eastern and Western contexts the use of portraiture to record and represent status has been an historically dominant artistic approach. Each culture has its own unique technique of presentation, and Chinese portraiture usually uses a brush to draw the subject on soft, thin paper or silk, which is then displayed in the form of a scroll. This is a technique that I have studied and applied in my own practice and which allows for a more subtle detail and a sense of reverence in the scroll form. For example, the portraits of the Ming imperial family in the South Hall (Figure 6), and the twelve portraits of the Ming people (Figure 7), all show the distinctive characteristics of the different figures. I have extended the language of this style of painting to a contemporary context in this project by focusing the depiction on ordinary people and expanding the depiction of an individual to a group of people. The portraits in this project are therefore a form of art that reproduces the subjects in a documentary manner. I also elevate my subjects in status and presence by using these traditional mentors once reserved for the elite and powerful members of society.



Fig 6. Unknown Artist. *Portrait of the Emperors of the Ming Dynasty (I)*: ten pieces, about 65.8x52.1cm, ink and colour on silk

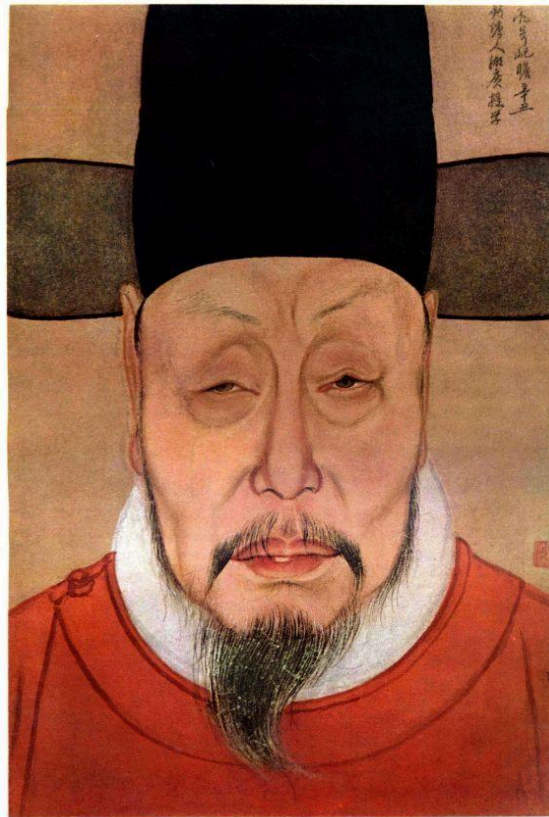


Fig 7. Unknown Artist. *The 12 Portraits of Ming Dynasty*. Nanjing Museum.

In times when photography was not available or affordable, artists would document individuals and groups to understand and communicate their lives and experiences. The history of civilisation has been recorded in large part thanks to the contributions of visual artists. Many scholars agree that there is an important link between portraiture and how we understand ourselves and others. Art also can be used to document and preserve the unique characteristics of these relationships, which are often overlooked due to their simplicity or ordinariness.

Group portraits have been used for centuries as a way for people to better understand both themselves and relationships with others through the medium of visual representation. Portraiture of two or more people were often documents to explain or express their relationship to each other, whether by legal contract, blood ties, or

professional or personal association. Individual identities, like group identities, can be portrayed in a variety of ways, depending on contemporary ideas about the purpose and function of families, institutions, and professional circles (West 2004, p.105). This means that, whereas individual portraits are frequently used to highlight the distinguishing characteristics of a single person, group portraits are intended to depict the commonality shared by all members of a group. In contrast, individual portraits are frequently used to highlight the distinguishing characteristics of a single person.

The depiction of a variety of human situations and social contexts can also be accomplished using the group portraiture. It is possible to extract information about people's lives, through understanding different environmental, social or geographical settings and contexts. A group photograph can reveal valuable information about the significance of a specific group at a particular moment (West 2004, p.106). Due to this rationale, I decided to present my portrait work in the context of groups or groupings. In particular, while the war veterans are specific individuals, they shared a communal identity and lived experience that reflected their political and social context. Therefore presenting their portraits in the context of a group in a grid format expands the context of how the viewer might read them.

The ideology of the group portrait, according to American Professor Jonathan Schroeder (2006), is the perceptual classification of people portrayed within a frame as belonging to a group or having something in common. This is accomplished using a framing device. He is a supporter of the group portrait form as a method for presenting one's identity in the context of community. The ideological function of portraiture was not limited to merely reflecting the individuals who were shown; rather, it also served to reflect the communities and societies in which those

individuals lived. Schroeder's ideas are relevant to my research because he helps explain how my group portrait series of the Chinese veterans can aid in reclaiming their status within the larger community.

The Chinese artist Xu Weixin also expanded the meaning of portrait painting in a contemporary context. He used black and white oil paintings to enlarge the documentary photographs of the victims during cultural revolution⁷ into large portraits of two to three metres in height, and his figures include not only political leaders and cultural figures, but also ordinary people.

The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) was a decade-long political movement launched by Mao Zedong against intellectuals, which killed between 1.4 million and 1.6 million Chinese, mostly intellectuals such as academics, teachers and professors, and wreaked havoc on Chinese society. Xu used the online media to collect information about the people and interview the subjects and their families, painting huge portraits of them while publishing information on his creative process through a blog, blending the history and reality of the portraits into one, pioneering a new way of focusing on history in art. His art is not meant to be a personal collection or a record, but rather a way of presenting individual lives from historical events to the public, thereby provoking the viewer to think about these events and people (Figure 8). This approach

⁷ The Cultural Revolution, formally known as the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, was a sociopolitical movement in the People's Republic of China (PRC) launched by Mao Zedong in 1966, and lasting until his death in 1976. Its stated goal was to preserve Chinese communism by purging remnants of capitalist and traditional elements from Chinese society. The Revolution marked the effective commanding return of Mao –who was still the Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)– to the centre of power, after a period of self-abstention and ceding to less radical leadership in the aftermath of the Mao-led Great Leap Forward debacle and the Great Chinese Famine (1959–1961). The Revolution failed to achieve its main goals.

encouraged me to consider focusing on portraiture in new ways, exploring social media and new forms of technology to expand traditional ways of making portraits. As such, this research project aims to expand on the contemporary meanings of Chinese portraiture as developed by Xu Weixin .



Fig 8. Xu Weixin. 2007. *History of China 1966-1976*. Today Art Museum, Beijing.

Painting is a record, a document and a visual language with intellectual and philosophical meanings open to interpretation. It is also the most widely used artistic medium in terms of portraiture. In the following texts, I analyse the use of portrait painting in relation to the experience or analysis of war.

This section examines the relationship between portraiture and World War II. In particular I am interested in the work of artists such as Gerhard Richter and Christian Boltanski, who both created bodies of work that reflected their personal experience with the war.

We may learn about the past and contemporary society by looking at portraits, which is one of the many reasons why portraiture remains prescient in contemporary art. It can enable potential analysis of the past alongside contemporary social realities. Artists can play critical roles in social transformation because they can at times represent the conscience of their era. They can express thoughts, feelings and emotions through their work, using a visual language, that others may not be able to put into words. In the context of war, artworks can be utilised to generate understanding and empathy with those who have experienced war firsthand.

Artists are often inspired by events around them, and wartime is no exception. Many artists sought to express their own concerns and feelings about war through portraits that captured its various aspects, such as Kathe Kollwitz. Some artists drew from their own experiences or from friends and family members who served in the military, such as Gerhard Richter. Others focused on the impact of war on civilians or directly captured scenes from the front lines, such as Boltanski. Some artists felt that they had a duty to document their experiences and observations during wartime, while others were more concerned with expressing what they witnessed, such as Xu Beihong. I discuss these examples in more details below. Additionally, artists would glorify power and promote fascist ideology, such as the director Leni Riefenstahl (1925-2002), who produced the infamous documentary films *Triumph of the Will* and *Olympia* in the years prior to World War II. Both films extoll the projected power and capture the spectacle of the fascist state. These different artistic approaches contribute to our understanding of this period in history. For example, Christian Boltanski, in his exhibition *The Reserve of Dead Swiss 1990* (Figure 9) portrays the tragedy of World War II on a large scale. In this work he clipped photographs from the death notices in

a provincial Swiss newspaper, *Le Nouvelliste du Valais*, photocopying and blowing up 42 of them so that the faces blurred unrecognisably, removing names and captions and lighting each with a single, naked electric bulb. Boltanski stated that “ The photo replaces the memory. When someone dies, after a while you can't visualize them anymore, you only remember them through their pictures.”



Fig 9. Christian Boltanski. 2019. *The Reserve of Dead Swiss*.

Pompidou Centre, Paris.

The outbreak of World War II generated a time of uncertainty, both for those making art and for those caught up in the war. Some artists chose to portray the war through abstract paintings that expressed their own personal experiences with violence and death, such as Picasso. Others used more traditional styles and subject matter to capture scenes from war-torn Europe or Asia, such as Gerhard Richter. Still others

dedicated their work entirely to supporting parties to the conflict, such as Leni Riefenstahl. Postwar, the legacy of this conflict continues to inform artistic practice. Contemporary Polish artist Piotr Uklanski, for example, produced *The Nazis*, 164 tightly cropped portraits of famous actors playing German soldiers. Culled from popular films, the collection of glossy portraits shows how trauma reemerges through fiction in slick, simple narratives that shape an understanding of messy, complex pasts (Figure 10). The artwork confronts the viewer with the romanticisation and commodification of war-related iconography in contemporary society. It serves as an invitation to critically examine our contemporary fascination with war as entertainment in popular culture.



Fig 10. Piotr Uklanski. 2008. *The Nazis*. Chromogenic black and white and colour photographs mounted on panels, in 164 parts 14 x 10 in.

The use of portraiture in wartime also addresses the chaos of combat. American scholar Jennifer M Wilcott in her 2013 study of artistic interpretations of war, suggests that certain tropes within wartime art aim to address a more immediate

picture of battle as a form of History Painting, reflecting the conditions and challenges of combat, whether consciously or unconsciously (Wilcott, p. 1).

When war is a subject for artists, art can become a medium through which the atrocities of war can be expressed. An example is Goya's Disasters of War series from the 1700's. This series attempts to represent the reality of war, including how it affects not only combatants but also civilians and even animals. According to Wilcott (2013): "wartime art does not deprive us of artistic beauty; rather, it fosters a different sensibility: beauty in the human condition, beauty in human compassion and courage, and a persistent sense of hope amid tragedy". Some of the portraits that artists made in response to World War II also foster a different sensibility. One notable example of portraits created in response to World War II is Pablo Picasso's painting "*Guernica*," completed in 1937. Picasso's powerful anti-war statement depicts the devastating bombing of the town of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War, a conflict that foreshadowed the broader horrors of World War II. Another example is the work of German-American artist George Grosz (July 26, 1893 – July 6, 1959) , known for his satirical and critical depictions of war and its aftermath. Grosz's drawings and paintings, such as "*Eclipse of the Sun*" and "*The Survivor*," provide a grim portrayal of the human cost of war, showcasing the physical and psychological wounds endured by soldiers and civilians alike. By depicting and documenting the Chinese veterans who lived through World War II I have also tried to generate a new form of beauty in exploring their human condition, the frailty of age and their individuality of expression. The use of traditional painting techniques also adds layers of visual beauty and delicacy to the portraits, further emphasising the subject's humanity and presence.

Art created during wartime can also articulate a form of humanism. It can be a means for artists to address war crimes and critique ideology and systems of power and address the societal impact of war as a whole. Genres of portraiture in response to World War II also demonstrate this. For example, Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* (1937), Yasuo Kuniyoshi's *The Vacation of the Virgin Mary* (1942) and Norman Rockwell's *Four Freedoms Series* (1943). These works were able to depict artists' reactions to what was happening around them: fear, hope, pride, anger—the list goes on. Artists also wanted to show what they hoped would happen in the future: peace, prosperity, victory—all things that would help them move forward after the war ended.

Artists also used their portraits as propaganda pieces that would inspire hope for victory over their enemies - artists in Germany and Japan did the same. The German sculptor Arno Breker created a highly idealised portrait of Adolf Hitler. This artwork was intended to portray Hitler as a powerful and charismatic leader, encouraging loyalty and support for the Nazi regime. In Japan, artists like Fujishima Takeji produced portraits of Emperor Hirohito, the symbol of the Japanese nation during World War II. These portraits were used as propaganda to promote patriotism, unity, and unwavering support for the emperor and the war effort. Many artists sought to use portraits that captured the various aspects of war. Gerhard Richter (born 9 February 1932) is a German visual artist who used portraiture to make artworks about World War II. He painted several portraits that depicted soldiers on the front lines and showed them as if they were caught in a moment of reflection or contemplation. These often ambiguous portraits were meant to reflect on the nature of war and how it affected those involved in it.

Some people believe that art should be used to depict reality and capture moments in

time. Artists like Gustave Courbet and Jean-François Millet were part of the Realist movement in the 19th century. They believed in depicting everyday life and the struggles of common people. Courbet's "*The Stone Breakers*" and Millet's "*The Gleaners*" are prime examples of this movement's commitment to representing reality. Others believe that art should not be constrained by reality, but rather should allow for freedom of expression and creativity. Surrealism, led by artists like Salvador Dali and René Magritte, was all about breaking free from reality. Surrealists sought to explore the world of dreams, the subconscious, and the irrational. Dali's "*The Persistence of Memory*" is a famous example of how surrealism allows for the expression of imaginative and dreamlike ideas. Abstract Expressionism, with artists like Jackson Pollock and Willem de Kooning, is known for its emphasis on emotion and spontaneity. These artists often rejected the idea of representing objects in the physical world, instead focusing on the act of painting itself. Pollock's "*Number 1A, 1948*" is a prime example of this movement's emphasis on pure abstraction and emotional expression. I believe that when considering how artists represented wartime, we must consider both these viewpoints; although it was important for artists to accurately depict what was happening around them during this time, it was also important for them to be able to express themselves freely without being limited by political restrictions.

War art is immersive and global, covering a wide range of genres. Even when the term "war art" gets more widely used, it remains broad (Wilcott 2013, p. 5). Some artists had experienced and depicted the battle from the front lines during World War II. For example, Edward Ardizzone, a British artist and official war artist during World War II, created a series of illustrations capturing scenes of daily life during the war. His drawings, often depicting soldiers in action, provide an intimate and immersive view

of wartime experiences. As a result, many of these artists produced paintings that captured what they saw and experienced during their time in combat. These paintings depicted not only the battles but also the everyday life of soldiers on the front lines. For example, American art history professor Bert Winther-Tamaki pointed out it is estimated that there were over 300 military painters in the Japanese army and navy, led by Tsuguharu Fujita (1886-1968), who emigrated to France and became known as Leonard Foujita. Saburo Miyamoto (1905-1974) was one of the most famous Japanese military painters of the Second World War, too. He is best known for his 1942 painting of *Yamashita Receiving the Surrender of Commander Shiraishiwa* (Figure 11).



Fig 11. Saburo Miyamoto. 1942. *Yamashita Receiving the Surrender of Commander Shiraishiwa*. Oil painting on canvas.

War artists working during this period were influenced by both modernism and traditional styles in portraiture or landscape. Having said that, it is of the utmost

importance to know most of these works were created not for the purpose of individual private consumption but rather for the general public to encounter and view. According to Wilcott (2013), war art encompasses more than just sketches or paintings; it also includes landscapes, portraiture, still life, propaganda, and memorials and monuments. She went on to say that war art is "art changed by conflict," For example, Picasso's "*Guernica*" is a striking example of how conflict can alter an artist's style and subject matter. This mural-sized painting was created in response to the bombing of the town of Guernica during the Spanish Civil War. It marks a departure from Picasso's previous work, featuring distorted, anguished figures and animals, reflecting the horrors of war.

Some of the most powerful forms of expression during war are arguably portraits. They express the human experience of war through the eyes and faces of individuals who were there, ordinary people who would not normally be subjects for art. In the text that follows, I analyse in detail some of the artists and their works that have inspired this research project examining outcomes of World War II and my focus on Chinese veterans of the Second Sino-Japanese war.

Käthe Kollwitz

Käthe Kollwitz (8 July 1867 - 22 April 1945) was a German artist who sympathised with the proletariat and depicted the effects of poverty, hunger and war on the working class. She used various artistic forms to represent the poverty of German society, the trauma of war and the misery of the working people, as well as the resistance of the oppressed. She espoused the ideals of opposing war, eradicating the root causes of war, and achieving an equal society. The Nazis used Kollwitz's

attendance at the funeral of the Jewish painter Max Liebermann in 1933 to accuse her of being a “white Jew” and to intimidate and persecute her. Her work was banned from exhibition and publication in Germany. The work of Kathe Kollwitz, which portrays the suffering and pain of ordinary people, is the ‘noblest German poem of this period,’ wrote French art historian Romain Rolland in 1927⁸. Art historian Ann Murray (2020) pointed out that in embracing antiwar sentiment, Kollwitz intended her work to reach as wide an audience as possible. She became the voice of the silenced and the sacrificed. I am interested in her work in the context of this study because she used portraiture to convey an indictment of war through a focus on direct, individual human experience, which is an important message I aim to convey through my portraits in this project. Although World War II is long past, many of the veterans who lived through it are still with us. I have used drawing and painting in expressive ways, recording ordinary individuals' lives referencing Kollwitz's approach. I have also created video documentaries of their lives and designed the entire project to be publicly available following Kollwitz's intentions for the accessibility and dissemination of her work.

Kollwitz also had an influence on Chinese art when she was alive. During World War II when China was experiencing oppression and humiliation, many artists wanted to awaken the people through their work, and the Chinese writer Lu Xun was the first to bring Kollwitz's art to China. Since then her artworks have deeply influenced many Chinese artists. For example, Xu Beihong, one of the most influential Chinese artists

⁸ Kollwitz's drawing illustrated the title page of the fourth and fifth printings of the German version, (Rolland 1921) and the version of the drawing used for the title page is lost (Nagel 1972, p. 354). Each copy is numbered up to a total of 1000 copies. The play was written in 1903 and explored numerous antiwar themes through an episode in the Boer War (1899–1902). Rolland described Kollwitz in 1927 thus: 'The work of Kaethe Kollwitz, which reflects the ordeal and pain of the humble and simple, is the grandest German poem of this age. This woman of virile heart has looked on them, has taken them into her motherly arms, with a solemn and tender compassion. She is the voice of the silence of the sacrificed'. Bohnke-Kollwitz, Jutta, ed. 2012. *Käthe Kollwitz. Die Tagebücher 1908–1943*, New edition. Munich: btb.

of the 20th century, was known for his oil paintings and ink wash paintings. He was deeply influenced by Kathe Kollwitz's emphasis on social justice and humanitarian themes. His works often depicted the suffering of the Chinese people during times of conflict and oppression, similar to Kollwitz's focus on human suffering. His painting "The Foolish Old Man Who Removed the Mountains" is an example of his commitment to conveying resilience and hope in the face of adversity. Kollwitz's paintings of the time also evoked the strong desire of the proletariat to oppose oppression and to fight against the Nazis. The first introduction of Kollwitz's prints in China was in 1931, in the inaugural issue of the left-wing literary journal *Beidou*. This work, entitled *Sacrifice* (Figure 12), is one of a series of prints by Kollwitz entitled *War*. *The Sacrifice* shows a naked mother holding a baby in her hands, looking at the child with eyes blazing with anger. Having lived through two world wars, Kollwitz's profound expressions of death, war and maternal love were so powerful that they later influenced many Chinese artists. Such as Xu Beihong, Feng Zikai and Wu Guanzhong. Feng Zikai was a prominent Chinese painter, illustrator, and writer. His drawings and illustrations often addressed social and political issues in a satirical and thought-provoking manner. Influenced by Kollwitz's emphasis on human emotions and the human condition, Feng's works touched on themes of suffering, empathy, and resilience, reflecting Kollwitz's influence in his artistic approach.



Fig 12. Käthe Kollwitz. 1922. *The Sacrifice*. Woodcut, 14 9/16 x 15 3/4".

The Walter Laundauer Collection of Käthe Kollwitz.

In my portraits I was also influenced by Kollwitz's black and white palette, the strong contrasts expressed in her work and the simplicity and power of her compositions. I felt a sense of oppression, a power that as she says, "I agree that my art has a purpose, a role to play in a time when humanity is so helpless and looking for assistance." Although working a century ago the issues that Kollwitz addressed are still prevalent, with many faced with the ongoing reality of conflict. The fact that such powerful works could be shown across different countries and across different language barriers at the time is also what I hope to achieve with my project.

What makes my approach different from that of Kollwitz is that I have expanded the meaning of the portrait itself and the way it is presented. The portrait is not just a flat painting, but I have documented the lives of those who have been through the ordeal of war with video and using a documentary approach, I have then used VR to make it immersive, experiential, and accessible to a worldwide audience.

Leon Golub

In addition to portraits of ordinary people persecuted during war, artists such as Leon Golub made portraits of people in positions of power and their relationships with the disempowered.

Leon Golub (January 23, 1922 – August 8, 2004) was an American painter who attempted to communicate the aura and strength of his figures through their facial expressions and bodily motions. It is his series of politically charged topics from the 1970s and 1980s, which include mercenaries, interrogations, torture chambers, and riots, that have brought him the most notoriety and serious critical attention. These works influenced generations of contemporary artists who address war crimes, and the abuse of power.

In terms of portraiture, Golub produced 100 portraits of political leaders, dictators, and religious figures between 1976 and 1979, including the Cuban leader Fidel Castro, the US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, the Chilean President Pinochet, and the Chinese leader Mao Zedong (Figure 13). Golub depicted these political figures at various stages of their lives, reflecting the impact and abuse of power through the portrayal of their facial expressions and bodily gestures.

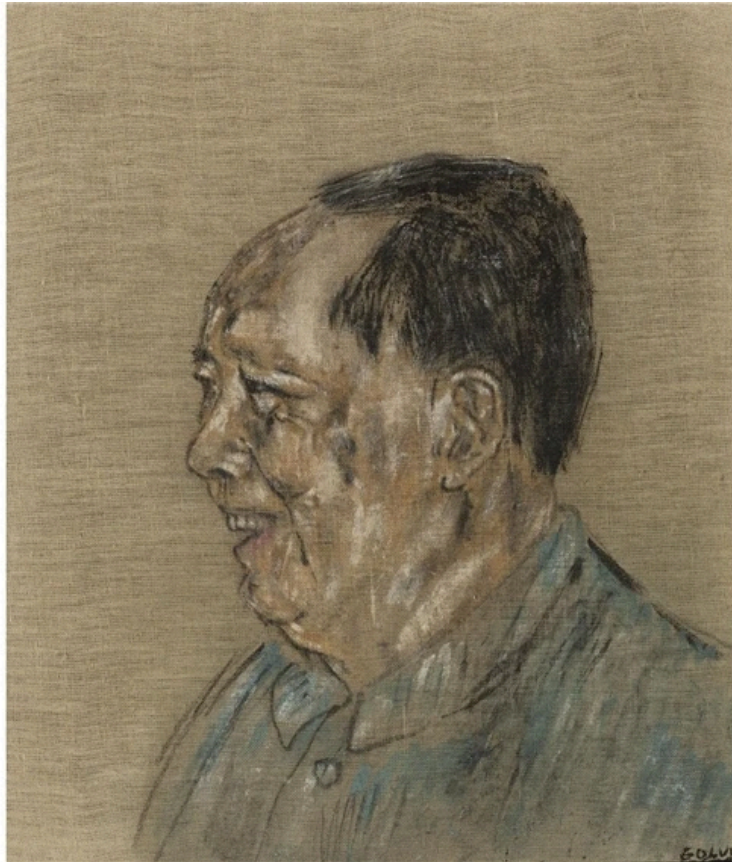


Fig 13. Leon Golub. *MAO TSE-TUNG, IV* (1962), acrylic on burlap Painting.

In a 1984 interview, Golub interpreted art and politics as “In the context of the 'real' world, art that is political reflects politics or resists and counters it.” According to Golub (1984) as cited by Bird (2016):

I painted portraits of political figures from 1976 to 1979, trying to get the more specific look of Brezhnev, Mao, Dulles, with their gentle skin and appearance, but so strangely these people had so much power in their hands. Looking at them in terms of their media images captured in photographs; with their particular looks, their loose skin, and the expressions of bitterness and smiles captured on them, gave me the right to exploit this interplay between

people, this way in which people look at each other or avoid looking at each other, which has reached its peak since 1979 with the large format in depicting that mutual gaze, and is a meaningful gaze. (Bird 2016, p. 24-26).

Golub depicted political figures who influenced the changing landscape of the entire world at the time: a post-World War II world in which global order was being re-established. Golub sought to document them through portraiture. One such group of portraits captured the ethos of those who controlled the world at the time. From 18 March to 15 September 2016, the British National Portrait Gallery exhibited this collection of works. Most of the people depicted are no longer living. This group of portraits shows the distinctive faces of powerful leaders long after the Second World War. I have similarly used a group presentation of individual subjects in my project, but the subjects I depict are seen as ordinary soldiers in World War II. Through this group portrait, I aim to convey the impact of different individual lives merging in the context of the fate of nations.

My subjects, the veterans who lived through World War II, were once the children of many ordinary families, anonymous folk compared to their contemporaries who were leaders with power, but the veterans were equally important participants in every event. My portraits are also in a dialogue with the portraits of Golub's leaders of power. As time goes on, both the leaders who once held power and the nameless soldiers leave the world, but wars continue to be fought. As the work of Golub and my own works show, there are still leaders who continue to dominate, nameless soldiers who continue to die, and veterans who have survived.

Gerhard Richter

From 1945, after the Second World War, European artists actively sought to innovate, paying particular attention to existential questions in their art. With the mass migration of artists to the United States, Paris lost its position as the world's centre of modern art. The United States rapidly emerged as the new hub of international art, due to the influx of intellectuals, creative people, writers, thinkers, activists brought in by the war.

In the late 1940s, American abstract expressionism became popular in Europe and influenced European art. The cosmopolitan character of American abstract art and its expansive scope for expression elicited great enthusiasm among young European artists. According to American art historian and art critic Thomas Crow, by the 1960s, European abstract art had achieved parity with its American counterpart. Young European artists were widely invited to exhibit their work during this period, particularly in Germany (Crow, 2004).

Gerhard Richter was an original, unique but also representative artist working at this time. Some of his portraits reflect on the war and the post-war world. The influence of the war, East Germany (GDR)'s centralised ideology and the experiences of his father's family in the war shaped the contradictory nature of Richter's personality, which also influenced his art.⁹

⁹ East Germany, officially the German Democratic Republic, was a state that existed from 1949 to 1990 in eastern Germany as part of the Eastern Bloc in the Cold War. Commonly described as a communist state, it described itself as a socialist "workers' and peasants' state". Its territory was administered and occupied by Soviet forces following the end of World War II—the Soviet occupation zone of the Potsdam Agreement, bounded on the east by the Oder-Neisse line. The Soviet zone surrounded West Berlin but did not include it and

The pressures of the environment in which Richter grew up in post war Dresden Germany and his own internal contradictions led him to oppose violence. *Uncle Rudy* (Figure 14) is one of the most important and best known of Richter's portraits. It is one of the few works by Richter in which the subject is clearly identified. It is based on photos from an old family album of Rudy, Richter's uncle, who died on the front in 1944. Richter unabashedly reveals his family's complicated relationship with National Socialism and World War II in the 1930s and 1940s by depicting Rudy grinning while wearing a Nazi uniform and standing in front of a building that resembles a barracks. This is a history that cannot be escaped by many wartime families and Richter honestly admitted this was the case with his own family. He used sincerity and candour to speak about what had been repressed and had been seen as shameful. The most essential thing about Richter's picture is that it conveys what the philosopher Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) calls "the banality of evil".

The banality of evil expressed in German art in the 1960s was foregrounded in 1961, when Arendt personally attended the trial of the Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann for his role in the Holocaust. Arendt learned that Eichmann himself had no ideological objections to Jewish culture and no apparent motive to commit murder. Rather than cruelty, he displayed extreme thoughtlessness and insensitivity. He did not think about his actions and obeyed orders from above automatically; he carried out instructions with a bureaucratic logic, without considering the consequences of his actions. Arendt argues that this guilt-free "mediocrity" was worse than the brutal massacre itself because it was shared by most of the population. For Arendt, the problem illustrated by this case of the Nazi war criminal is that many people involved in perpetrating the

West Berlin remained outside the jurisdiction of the GDR.

Holocaust, like Eichmann, were not insane or psychologically disturbed but simply unresponsive and ordinary. From a legal point of view and a humanitarian point of view, this mundane unconsciousness is even more frightening than outright criminality, because it is a new form of criminal psychology (Arendt, 1994).



Fig 14. Gerhard Richter. 1965. *Uncle Rudy*. Oil on canvas, 87 x 50 cm.

Lidice Gallery, Lidice, Czech Republic.

Uncle Rudy offers a typical example of such seemingly non-hostile “ordinariness”. In Richter's picture, the soldier Rudy smiles “innocently” at the camera; his expression conveys neither fanaticism nor guilt at the crimes he may have committed during the

Nazi period. Richter's objective and unsentimental depiction of the 'ordinariness' or 'banality' of the evil of the war criminal, who is part of his own family, strengthens the impact of the work, which is both an indictment of evil and a reminder that such evil can be found in the ordinary people around us. We can also see the traces of Richter's ambivalence when he created this work, oscillating between family member and criminal, mundanity and violence, peace, and war. There is a sense of instability in the image. Richter rejected any definition of his mode of expression, such as idealism, realistic subjectivity, or constructed colour relationships. The Museum of Modern Art Senior Curator Robert Storr believes Richter was against war and violence, but his work reveals that he was a 'painter who thought in terms of conceptual art or a conceptual artist who painted primarily, creating a contradiction (Storr 2002, p. 51).

Richter's portrait of *Uncle Rudy* is a depiction of a subject who lived through the Second World War, reflecting the sense of insignificance and powerlessness of an individual's fate during the war. In reference to this quality in Richter's work and the methods he used to achieve it, I have also tried to reflect the disempowerment my veterans experienced. I have tried to represent this in my project, reflecting their experiences and stories through the portrayal of their individual facial and bodily characteristics. My portraits also reflect a sense of 'instability', the bodies and clothes are often unfinished suggesting a fading away of the person. These veterans are 'fading away' in real life, they are very aged and many have died since the start of my project.

Richter lived at a time when photographic technology was developing and becoming more widespread, and he could easily use it to aid his compositions. He developed

new technical approaches to portraiture, and although he incorporated photographic techniques, his work still retains a painterly feel. This mutual borrowing was groundbreaking for the time.

His works depict people in war through a strong and simple language of painting informed by the language of photography, which is what I hope to also achieve in my paintings, as I have also used photography as a mode of recording the veterans, I have then in some cases painted from the photographs. Unlike Richter, I wanted to use my portraits in a group presentation to reflect a collective experience, juxtaposing many different figures and different encounters, who were gathered into a common situation during that time.

Christian Boltanski

Boltanski was born on September 6, 1944, at the end of the World War II. As a result of his father's Jewish background, Boltanski's work was impacted by both the war and the Jewish massacres that occurred during the war. It is his photographic works paired with installations that are known for blurring the line between truth and fiction and questioning the borders between memory, death, and life. These themes resonated strongly with the aims of my research project. Boltanski was born in Paris, France to a Christian mother of Corsican descent and a Jewish doctor who had emigrated from Ukraine. During the 18 months of Germany's occupation of Paris, his father lived in a hidden mezzanine between two floors to avoid deportation, relying on Boltanski's mother's income. Boltanski did not go to school until he was 12. His artistic skills were largely self-taught. His early work involved mainly painting; later, he turned his attention to photography, sculpture, and installations, constituting a creative practice

that would last throughout his life. In his early years, Boltanski used childhood objects and photography to fuse reality and fiction, creating fabricated autobiographical works that seemed to show his own real-life childhood but in fact revealed common childhood memories during the war years. He collected a wide range of anonymous objects, from clothing to unidentifiable photographs, to symbolise the absence or disappearance of personal traces. His work anonymised individuals making the multiple persons he depicted stand in for everyone or all people, often presented in large constellations or groups of portraits. This approach provided a model for the grid-like presentations I used of my portrait series, and for the idea of multiples presented together.

Christian Boltanski's first solo exhibition, titled *La Vie Impossible de Christian Boltanski* (*The Impossible Life of Christian Boltanski*), was held in 1968. For this exhibition, Boltanski created an installation that captured memories by selecting photographs from postcards, newspapers, police registries, and family albums that were found in local historical sources. The resulting installation served as a repository for memories. There was also an exhibition of a huge number of smaller installations that included photos of individuals. These installations, which are now considered to be classic examples of Boltanski's work, are what collectors refer to as a "personal ethnology." He amassed quite the collection of pertinent items, many of which he later displayed publicly. He represented the magnitude of the atrocity of war using a magnitude of things, objects, and images. Boltanski played with the double meaning of the word "enormous" to portray the tragedy of the time on a massive scale.

In 1980, he developed an artwork that resembled an altar by mixing handcrafted square boxes, light bulbs, and images of Jewish schoolchildren taken in the early

1930s, with an emphasis on the composition of the photographs. The significance of the presentation of the installation was increased because of this. *The Reserve of Dead Swiss* (Figure 9) is an assemblage that was made by Boltanski in the year 1990. It is comprised of 42 photographic portraits of men, women, and children of varying ages holding light bulbs. These images are set in a sequential fashion on three rows. The photographs in this work were drawn by the artist from obituaries published in the Swiss press, and the grainy images were recreated as life-size prints to represent the death of a handsome albeit unidentifiable man (Caines, 2004).

Boltanski's works, I believe share the same confusion and contradictions as my work in this project, the subject matter and themes revolve around the propositions of fate, death, and memory: the most fundamental fact about human beings, namely that every human being comes to an end; no matter how much one disguises and seeks to avoid it, one will at some point disappear completely. Alongside these shared themes and content, the format of Boltanski's work provided examples for my own approach. I understood that the way display is used in his installations enhanced the emotive and expressive power of the original portraits. In my portraits, display has become an important part of the work for the same reason. In presenting the documentary film, I also treat presentation as an important part of the work, as Boltanski does in combining video screens as part of his installations in works.

Boltanski's installations are meticulously designed to enhance the power and emotional resonance of his artworks. He understands that the presentation of the artwork is not merely a secondary consideration but an integral part of the artistic expression itself. This insight has resonated with me and informed my own approach to displaying paintings within the immersive VR environment.

In Boltanski's exhibition installations, the physical space becomes an active participant in the narrative, creating a heightened sense of engagement and immersion for the viewers. The careful arrangement of objects, photographs, and lighting creates an atmospheric and evocative ambiance, eliciting emotional responses and inviting personal introspection. I find this integration of space and artwork to be incredibly powerful and inspiring.

Drawing inspiration from Boltanski, I have applied similar principles in my VR display context. I have carefully considered the spatial layout and design, ensuring that it complements and amplifies the impact of the paintings. By strategically positioning the virtual canvases, adjusting lighting effects, and incorporating atmospheric elements, I aim to create an immersive experience that not only showcases the artworks but also deepens the emotional connection between the viewer and the subject matter.

Boltanski's installations often convey a sense of intimacy and personal connection, despite addressing universal themes. This ability to create an intimate and immersive environment is something I strive to emulate in my VR display. By harnessing the capabilities of virtual reality technology, I aim to transport the viewer into a virtual realm where they can engage with the artworks on a deeper level. The VR environment allows for a more interactive and multisensory experience, enabling viewers to explore the paintings from various angles, zoom in on intricate details, and even interact with elements within the virtual space.

Ultimately, Boltanski's innovative use of installation methods has influenced my own

approach to presenting paintings within the VR display context. By considering the spatial arrangement, incorporating atmospheric elements, and leveraging the immersive capabilities of virtual reality, I aim to create a dynamic and emotionally impactful viewing experience that resonates with the viewer and enhances their engagement with the artworks.

Luc Tuymans

Tuymans belonged to the post-World War II baby boom period. At that time, the political, economic, and cultural tension created by the Second World War had not long subsided. Tuymans was born in Belgium. At that time, it was ideally situated between major capitalist countries, which determined its economic, cultural, and artistic identity.

As a child, Tuymans loved to doodle and was particularly interested in painting. However, the influence of the environment in which he grew up was far-reaching and deeply influenced his thinking on painting. According to artist and writer Steel Stillman, in several interviews, Tuymans said that he had been a painter for many years and that he was particularly interested in Western politics and history, as these are inextricably linked to the environment in which he grew up (Stillman 2010, p. 78). Tuymans' mother was from the Netherlands and his father was from Belgium and both came from different social and political milieus. From an early age, he was exposed to a home environment that was less than peaceful, as well as the prevailing legacy of the Second World War, Nazism, the Holocaust, and Belgian colonialism. All these social and political influences were in his life.

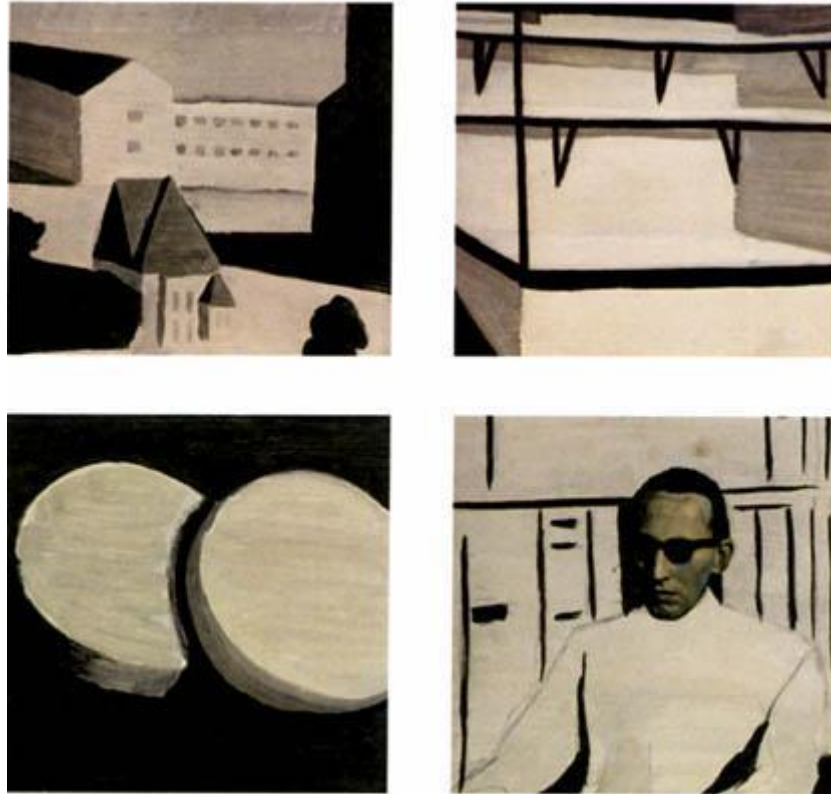


Fig 15. Luc Tuymans.1988. *The time/ Die ZeitDate*. Belgium.

The Time (Figure 15) is a series of paintings by Luc Tuymans. Interestingly, this series of works covers landscapes, still lives and portraits, and the seemingly ordinary subject matter depicts little-known historical events from World War II. The four works, painted on oil on canvas, are assembled with a strong sense of storytelling. The first work depicts a small-town house in black and white, with a striking contrast between light and dark; the shadows of the house occupy the visual centre of the painting and the grey, clean ground.

Luc Tuymans never considers the rigour of the object's form. For example, curved lines are used to render the supposedly straight lines of the building, and the figurative style turns the scene into a theatre of mystery. The direction of the projection of the house is unclear, and the story begins quietly on a quiet afternoon in a quiet town. The

second image is a zoomed-in close-up of the camera, with a triangle of horizontal and vertical lines and black stripes on closer inspection, The third image is a close-up of a pill, and the dark grey of the tabletop reveals the painterly use of brushwork.

The last image depicts a figure with a neatly drawn face, whose seriousness creates a sense of suspense. Large areas of white space highlight the dullness and the lean structure of the character's face. The sunken cheeks make the nose appear even thinner. The character's facial features are clearly those of a leader; his eyes are obscured by sunglasses, but his powerful presence can still be felt. The works in this series are linked together in a way that makes the story ambiguous and striking.

Tuymans explains that this last portrait is the end of the story, whose implications are fascinating. During World War II, the Nazis did everything they could to win the war, developing pills and poisons to achieve their aggressive aims. They slaughtered six million Jews, gypsies, communists and others including disabled people and many Christians and people identifying as LGBTQ+; it is impossible to imagine the extent of the atrocities committed. Tuymans thus explores here the most obscure and forbidden aspects of wartime history.

In my documentary, I have intensified the details of the war in such a way as to give a more concrete picture of its brutality. The connection between Tuymans' painting and documentary film lies in the shared objective of exploring and presenting historical events, particularly those related to war. While Tuymans expresses his ideas and interpretations through his paintings, I employ the medium of documentary to convey a deeper understanding of the war and its impact.

Both Tuymans' paintings and my documentary serve as vehicles for storytelling and raising awareness. Tuymans' *"The Time"* series, with its depictions of lesser-known historical events from World War II, prompts viewers to contemplate the hidden aspects of wartime history. Similarly, my documentary aims to intensify the details of the war, providing a concrete and vivid portrayal of its brutality. In utilising the documentary medium, I have incorporated visual footage, interviews, archival materials, and narration to convey a comprehensive narrative and engage viewers on an intellectual and emotional level.

Moreover, both Tuymans' paintings and my documentary challenge the audience's perception of the war and its consequences. Tuymans' unconventional approach to form and his exploration of forbidden aspects of wartime history disrupt conventional narratives and invite viewers to confront uncomfortable truths. Similarly, my documentary seeks to present a more nuanced and realistic picture of the war, moving beyond traditional accounts to expose the true extent of its atrocities. By incorporating virtual reality technology into my documentary, I also aim to provide an immersive and intense experience that allows viewers to engage with the subject matter on a deeper level.

In essence, while Tuymans' paintings and my documentary may differ in their artistic medium, they both share a common goal of shedding light on historical events and encouraging a more profound understanding of the war. By connecting Tuymans' exploration of wartime history through painting with my use of documentary, I aim to leverage the power of visual storytelling to convey the significance and impact of the war to a wider audience.

Xu Beihong

In China, World War II is most known as the War of Resistance against Japan, it was also called the Eight Years' War of Resistance, from 1937 to 1945. After fighting for eight years against Japan, the soldiers of the Chinese resistance played a significant part in the combat against fascism that was raging around the world.

During World War II, artists from a variety of countries were in constant communication with one another, often sharing ideas, and collaborating on projects. They used the tools and intellectual ideas of their art as instruments to spread awareness about the global anti-fascist war. They sought to rouse the people, inspire the soldiers, fight the common enemy and endorse peace.

British art historian and collector Michael Sullivan pointed out that through official foreign cultural exchange agencies or other forms of foreign cultural associations, artists in China engaged in dialogue and other forms of exchange with Britain, India, France, the United States, and the Soviet Union (Sullivan, 1996). The exchange of artworks, letters and criticism and the formation of solidarity and support between artists across the world reflected their sincere and deep friendship, also their professional exchange, collaboration, and dialogues. Cultural alliances helped to strengthen political alliances and unite the will and actions of different countries in the struggle against a common enemy, making a major contribution to the eventual Allied victory.

Xu Beihong (July 1895-September 1953) was a master of Chinese painting, a pioneer in the reform of Chinese painting, and an art educator. In 1918, Xu Beihong was

appointed by the President of Peking University, Cai Yuanpei, as the instructor of the Peking University Painting Research Society. In the following year, he went to Paris and immersed himself in French art. He went on to study drawing and painting in Berlin and Belgium. On his return to China in 1927, he was engaged in the creation of art and art education for a long time.

After the Lugou Bridge Incident¹⁰, Beijing, Shanghai, Nanjing and Wuhan fell one after the other, and many Chinese citizens fled with their children to the rear to avoid being enslaved. To raise money for the homeless refugees and promote China's war effort, Xu Beihong decided to hold relief exhibitions abroad. Xu Beihong took many of his works to Singapore, India and Malaysia via Hong Kong and began a three-year tour of Southeast Asia. He was convinced that art belonged to the people, and that only the people could save their country from peril. He therefore decided to dedicate his art to the people to contribute to the liberation of the Chinese nation and the Chinese people. The series of paintings that he produced during the war, such as *Put Down Your Whip* (Figure 16) and *Yugong Yishan*, are profoundly meaningful; they reflect his extreme grief and anger at the national disaster, as well as his hope for his country and his people.

¹⁰ Lugou Bridge Incident or the July 7 Incident, was a July 1937 battle between China's National Revolutionary Army and the Imperial Japanese Army. Since the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, there had been many small incidents along the rail line connecting Beijing with the port of Tianjin, but all had subsided. On this occasion, a Japanese soldier was temporarily absent from his unit opposite Wanping, and the Japanese commander demanded the right to search the town for him. When this was refused, other units on both sides were put on alert; with tension rising, the Chinese Army fired on the Japanese Army, which further escalated the situation, even though the missing Japanese soldier had returned to his lines. The Marco Polo Bridge Incident is generally regarded as the start of the Second Sino-Japanese War, and arguably World War II.



Fig 16. Xu Beihong. 1939. *Put Down Your Whip*. Oil painting. 144 cm × 90 cm.

Xu Beihong's painting *Put Down Your Whip* delicately portrays the state of life and mentality of local people during the war, providing a poignant commentary on the harsh realities and emotional turmoil experienced by individuals during conflict. The painting depicts a scene from the one-act play adapted by Tian Han, where a poor father and his daughter, Heung, are forced to wander and perform on the streets after being uprooted from their hometown due to Japanese occupation.

Through Xu Beihong's artistry, the painting captures the plight of the displaced characters. The girl, dressed in a white and blue costume adorned with symbolic motifs, dances with a piece of red silk, representing a glimmer of hope and resilience amid their adversity. The composition includes a range of spectators, some wearing

tattered clothes and others donning military uniforms, their hands intertwined, and their faces transfixed. This juxtaposition of different individuals conveys the collective experience and shared struggle of the local people during the war.

The painting's significance lies in its ability to evoke empathy and reflect the common hardships endured by ordinary citizens. Xu Beihong's portrayal of the characters' expressions and body language communicates their resilience, determination, and yearning for a better future. The painting serves as a powerful representation of the resilience and spirit of the Chinese people during a time of national crisis.

In relation to my own project, Xu Beihong's depiction of the state of life during the war resonates with my intention to focus on the individual fates of war veterans. While there are few portraits that specifically highlight the personal stories and experiences of these veterans, my project aims to fill this gap by providing a platform for their narratives to be shared and preserved. In this sense, I have been influenced by Xu Beihong's approach to realism, which emphasises the importance of depicting realistic subjects and engaging with thought-provoking issues in contemporary society in ways that are accessible to the general public.

Additionally, Xu Beihong's dedication to using art to awaken people aligns with the purpose of my project. Inspired by his belief that socially engaged artists should focus on realistic subjects, I aim to shed light on the individual stories and sacrifices of war veterans, using realism, helping to create a deeper understanding and appreciation for their contributions. By referencing Xu Beihong's historical work and his emphasis on realism, my project seeks to continue his legacy and contribute to the exploration and development of war narratives in contemporary art.

Overall, Xu Beihong's painting *Put Down Your Whip* not only captures the state of life during the war but also serves as a source of inspiration for my project, influencing my approach to realism and the portrayal of individual fates within a collective context. Through my documentary, I aim to honour Xu Beihong's vision by presenting a heartfelt tribute to war veterans and amplifying their voices in the collective memory of the war.

IRWIN

IRWIN is a collective of Slovenian artists, primarily painters, and an original founding member of Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK). In 2018, they collaborated with the Museum of History of Bosnia and Herzegovina to produce an exhibition of portraits, "*Heroes 1941-1945*" (Figure 17). They choose portraits of people's heroes from the storage facilities of the Museum of History of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Sarajevo where they had remind for almost 80 years, painted by Bosnian and Herzegovinian artists between 1948 and 1953. All the portraits were painted with one goal in mind: to preserve the memory associated with the partisans and anti-fascist fighters 's heroes.

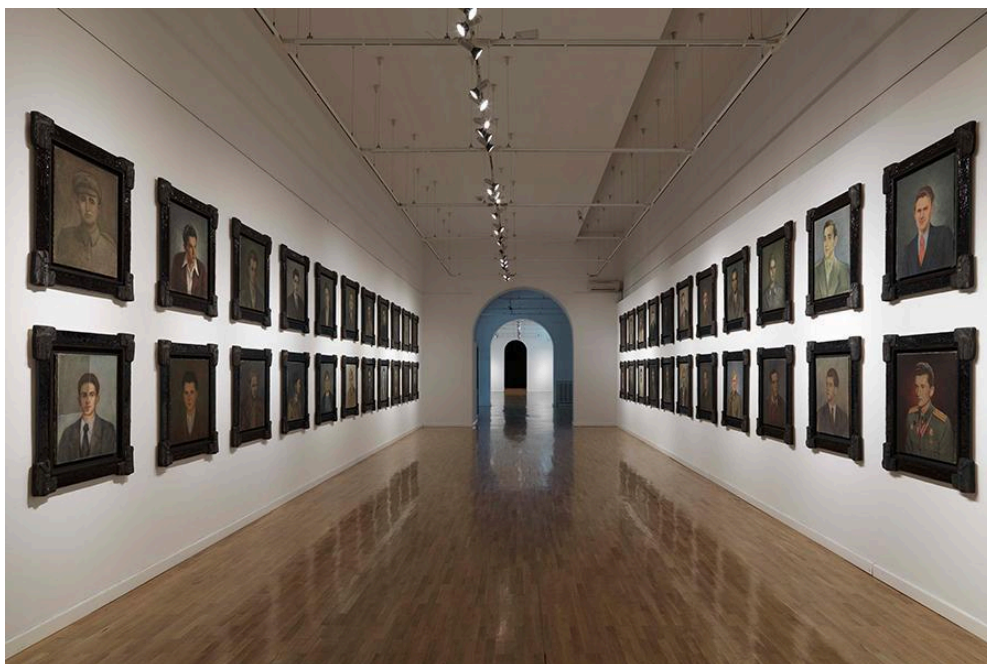


Fig 17. IRWIN. 2018. *Bosnia and Herzegovina / Heroes 1941–1945*.

Using existing portraits and incorporating them into huge tailor-made frames gave a new meaning to these works, which were part of a project specifically designed for Banja Luka. The form of presentation offers new possibilities for interpretation and observation of the heritage of the socialist era. For IRWIN, the artist's work is characterised by a keen wit and sense of ambiguity, expressing the complex and subtle links between art and ideology. The curatorial decisions made in terms of the approach to display becomes an act of re-memory of that time.

In my project the subjects I portray are still alive, and in addition to documenting them in portrait paintings, I have interviewed them in the form of documentary film. This expands the meaning of portraits, which are no longer just two-dimensional works, but also three-dimensional images. Using VR space technology, I have restored the location of historical events, so that the viewer can feel like they are there, even though they are not present.

Like IRWIN, my project aims to offer new possibilities for the interpretation and observation of the heritage of the socialist era. While IRWIN focuses on the cultural legacy of Slovenia's socialist past as part of the Yugoslav federation, my documentary endeavours to shed light on the personal stories and experiences of war veterans from the Chinese context. By presenting their narratives through a contemporary lens with the use of VR, I seek to encourage a deeper understanding and engagement with this important historical period.

Furthermore, just as IRWIN's work involves curatorial decisions that shape the presentation of their art, I have also made deliberate choices in curating my documentary. Through careful selection of interviews, archival materials, and visual elements, I aim to create a cohesive and compelling narrative that supplies background context, honours the veterans and invites viewers to reflect on the significance and meaning of their contributions.

In the presentation of my work, I have considered the aesthetic and emotional impact of different elements, such as the sequencing of interviews, the use of evocative imagery, and the incorporation of personal artefacts. These curatorial decisions aim to enhance the storytelling and create a meaningful and immersive experience for the audience. By strategically weaving together the individual narratives, I seek to create a collective tapestry that reflects the diversity and unity of the war veterans' experiences.

Overall, my project, influenced by the principles of IRWIN, aims to offer new interpretations and observations of the socialist era's heritage through a focus on the

individual stories of war veterans. By employing curatorial decisions that enhance the presentation and storytelling, I aspire to create a multi-part work that not only pays tribute to the veterans but also engages viewers in a deeper understanding of the entire cultural and historical period and its lasting impact.

Piotr Uklański

Portraits of individuals from the World War II era include depictions not only of the persecuted but also of the perpetrators, the Nazis.

The Polish contemporary artist Piotr Uklański, who was born in the late 1960s, spent nearly ten hours combining multimedia such as video and music to create the installation *Untitled (Dancing Nazis)* (Figure 18), which included 166 stills of film stars from Ronald Reagan to Ralph Fiennes, all dressed in Nazi officer uniforms. It lacks a primary title, to avoid commemorating the Nazis' aggression in World War II, but its subtitle ironically reminds the world of the mercilessness of the perpetrators.

Among countless images of Nazi soldiers, some from historical archives and many from images of Nazis in Hollywood or other countries' films or filmography. Upbeat funk music is played against the sound of troops marching in the background. With floor lighting resembling that of a nightclub, visitors to this artwork feel as if they are in a giant video game dance machine (Ukłański, 1999). Is the sound of footsteps behind the appearance of joy leading humans to prosperity, or does it imply the horror of a murderous purge? This work took up the entire atrium of the Palazzo Grassi in Venice when it was exhibited there in 2008. The funk music from the 1980s, interspersed with the sounds of the marching troops, was heard in all the display

rooms. Showcasing Nazi imagery from popular culture, Uklanski seeks to demonstrate that our repeated selection of attractive actors to play Nazi characters has resulted in a blind obsession with Nazism.

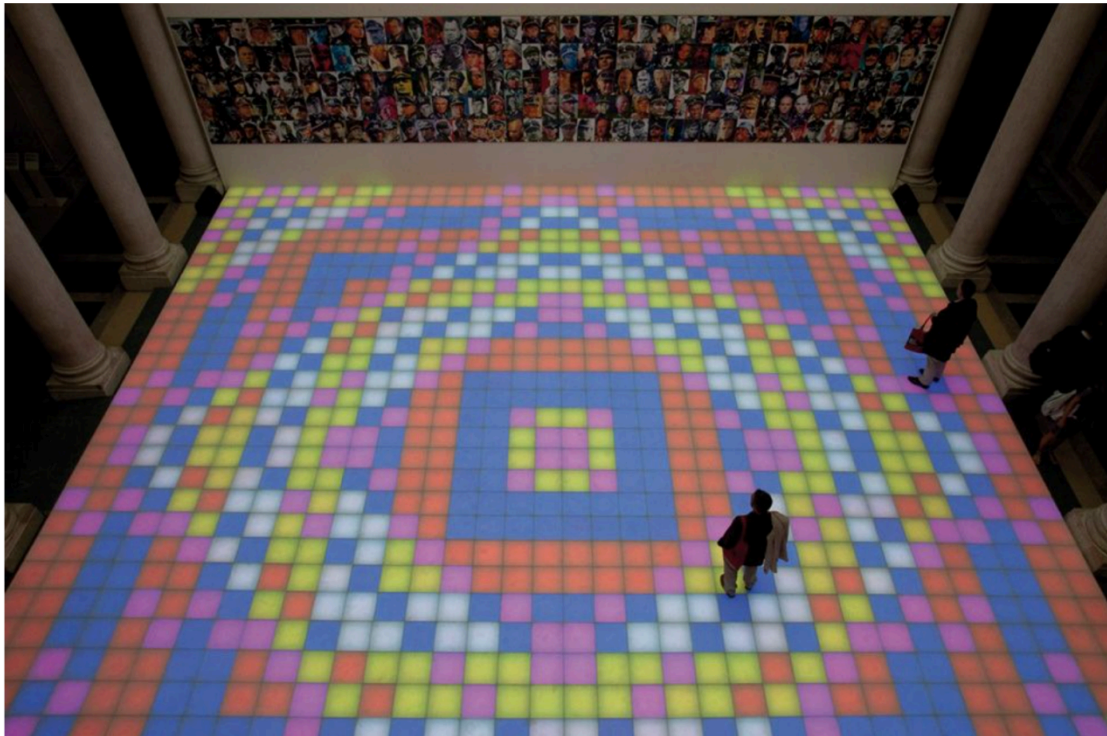


Fig 18. Piotr Uklanski. 2008. *Untitled (Dancing Nazis)*.

I have chosen his work to reference because as technology and media continue to develop, so do artists' methods of creation, and his methods of presentation have evolved with the times. In dialogue with the art of Uklanski, I also adopt a contemporary approach to the construction of my work, and have used VR as a presentation tool for this project. The way his work is displayed incorporates a lot of new technology, such as lighting and prints, but it still requires a display space. My project incorporates the use of VR technology to break through the limitations of the space and allow the viewer, who is in a different location, to experience the exhibition in a completely different way. Virtual reality allows the viewer to immerse themselves

in a simulated environment, creating a sense of presence and engagement that goes beyond traditional forms of exhibition. Unlike physically visiting a gallery or exhibition space, VR enables the viewer to navigate through a virtual representation of the artwork from the comfort of their own location.

By using VR technology, my project breaks through the limitations of physical space. It provides the opportunity for viewers to explore the exhibition and engage with the artwork in an immersive, expanded way. They can virtually walk through the online gallery, examine the portraits up close, and experience the curated narrative and accompanying elements, such as audio commentary or contextual information, all within a digital environment.

The use of VR technology offers a unique and immersive perspective that traditional exhibition spaces cannot provide. It allows for a more interactive and personalised encounter with the artwork. Viewers can have a sense of agency as they navigate through the virtual space and have a closer connection with the portrayed war veterans and their stories.

By utilizing VR technology, my project transcends the constraints of physical space, offering viewers an immersive and expansive experience. It allows them to virtually navigate through the exhibition, interact with artwork, and engage with curated narratives and accompanying elements, such as audio commentary or contextual information, within a digital environment. However, it's important to acknowledge the existence of the "digital divide," which refers to disparities in access to and proficiency with digital technologies among different socioeconomic groups. As UCLA Professor Blanchette (2011) articulates, "The 'digital divide' is not simply a

gap in access to digital information and communication technologies; it is a material infrastructure that relies on, extends, and amplifies a host of preexisting divides in social, economic, and political power." This quote underscores the profound implications of the digital divide, highlighting how it perpetuates existing inequalities by further marginalizing individuals and communities without adequate access to digital resources. In the context of my VR project, while it offers innovative opportunities for engagement, its reliance on digital infrastructure may inadvertently exacerbate disparities by excluding those who lack access to or familiarity with VR technology. Thus, it is essential to address these inequalities in the future to ensure equitable participation and access to digital experiences like the one offered by my project.

In summary, I researched these artists and artists groups with the intention that their work would influence and inform my process, the research behind my project and the presentation formats I finally developed. Through examining the work of traditional and contemporary Chinese masters I sought to explore a new approach to portraiture by utilising the traditional portrait painting techniques on silk. In the context of post-World War II China, where the dominance of Western oil painting techniques prevailed, my decision to employ the traditional Chinese technique on silk introduced a distinct and innovative method. Firstly, in the post-World War II era in China, Western oil painting techniques were predominant, and traditional Chinese painting on silk was relatively less explored. By adopting this technique, my project brings forth a revitalisation of traditional Chinese art forms within the context of wartime portraiture. It represents an innovative approach to Chinese tradition and invites a reevaluation of the cultural and artistic heritage of China.

Furthermore, employing the traditional Chinese technique on silk offers a unique aesthetic quality. Silk as a medium has a long-standing significance in Chinese culture, symbolising elegance, delicacy, and refinement. By incorporating this material, the portraits gain a sense of cultural authenticity and evoke a connection to the rich artistic traditions of China. It also confers on the subjects painted a sense of elegance, refinement and cultural significance which enriches the viewers perception of the veterans I have portrayed.

Overall, the decision to employ the traditional Chinese technique on silk introduces a distinct and innovative method that not only revitalises traditional art forms but also adds cultural depth and aesthetic value to the portraits. It creates a juxtaposition between the historical context of war and the artistic heritage of China, offering viewers a fresh perspective on wartime portraiture.

In conclusion, while the contemporary art scene in China has witnessed a proliferation of artists using oil painting as their medium, there has been a limited exploration of traditional Chinese portrait painting techniques in portraying contemporary subjects. This is where my project stands out as a unique endeavour that revitalises the traditional art form in a modern context.

When we examine the works of renowned artists such as Zhang Xiaogang, Liu Xiaodong, and Yue Minjun, who have made significant contributions to contemporary Chinese portraiture, we primarily see the use of oil painting techniques on canvas. Their works often exhibit a blend of Western influences and social commentary, capturing the spirit of a rapidly changing China. However, the incorporation of traditional Chinese portrait painting techniques, such as traditional techniques on silk,

remains relatively unexplored.

By employing the traditional technique on silk, my project breaks away from the dominant trend and offers a fresh perspective on contemporary portraiture. The meticulously detailed brushwork and vibrant colours characteristic of traditional painting imbue the portraits with a sense of refinement and cultural heritage. This juxtaposition of traditional technique and modern subject matter creates a compelling visual dialogue that challenges conventional notions of portraiture.

Furthermore, my project draws inspiration from the work of renowned traditional painters throughout Chinese history, such as Zhou Fang, Qiu Ying, and Ren Xiong. These masters employed the technique to depict imperial figures, scholars, and everyday people, capturing their essence with precision and grace. By referencing these esteemed artists and their techniques, I aim to pay homage to the rich tradition of Chinese portrait painting while infusing it with contemporary relevance.

Through my project, I aimed to contribute to the diversity of artistic expressions within the realm of portrait painting. By breathing new life into traditional techniques and adapting them to contemporary themes, I hoped to offer viewers a fresh perspective and a deeper appreciation for the cultural heritage of Chinese portraiture. In doing so, I aspire to inspire other artists and scholars to explore the untapped potential of traditional Chinese art forms in the modern era.

My project not only showcases my technical proficiency and artistic vision but also serves as a testament to the enduring significance and versatility of traditional Chinese portrait painting. By combining traditional techniques with contemporary subject

matter, I have endeavoured to push the boundaries of artistic representation and contribute to the ongoing evolution of Chinese art.

2.3 Documentary Film

Documentary films over the last century have been used as a medium for exploring, expressing, and discussing politics, social change, and cultural issues. For the purposes of this research project, I decided to explore this medium as I hoped it could transcend the immensity of the wartime subjects I am addressing by creating personal and more intimate representations of human nature, recording, and documenting situations or simply life as it is lived. In this text, I discuss how documentary film has been used throughout history as an expanded and contemporary means of portraiture as well as exploring how it is being used today by artists who are interested in telling stories about their own or others lives through video footage or through reenactments using real people instead of actors playing their parts.

According to film researchers Ellis and McLane (2005), documentary film is not about making a story using actors, but about dealing with components of the real world regarding a certain issue, or at least being aware of it. Patricia Aufderheide (2007) is University Professor in the School of Communication at American University in Washington, D.C. In her book *Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction*, she pointed out that when compared to other types of filmmaking, documentary film is distinguished by several distinct qualities that are unique to the genre. The style, realism, authenticity, and objectivity of the piece are some of these traits. Documentary film has been used throughout history to tell stories in the same way that historical portraiture functioned. It is a form of non-fiction filmmaking that

attempts to document reality in an objective manner. Documentary filmmaking is conducted with the intention of recording reality on film rather than fabricating or re-creating it.

Documentary filmmaking as we know it now began in the 1920s in North America, the Soviet Union, France, Germany, and Holland (Ellis & McLane, 2005). In 1922 Robert Flaherty made *Nanook Of The North*, generally cited as the first feature length documentary depicting the lives of the indigenous Inuit people of Canada's northern Quebec.

In addition to its importance in documenting social history, documentary film and video is also used to educate, entertain and inform audiences. It can also serve power as a propaganda tool. Documentary film can be a source of information, and can provide authentic reenactment and authentic footage that can be used to represent the lives of real people and their culture. Documentary filmmaking has transformed and evolved over time, it remains one of the most popular and significant forms of visual storytelling today.

The importance of documentary film is evident in its work of documenting social history. It allows people to see events that they may not have experienced themselves or would not have access to otherwise. The fact that so much material exists gives historians and social scientists an opportunity for detailed analysis of the subject matter covered by these films. Documentary films also provide insight into how people lived their lives during certain times in history, which helps give context for future generations who are interested in learning about those periods as well as helping them understand why things happened as they did during those periods.

The period of World War II was also a time when documentarians were beginning to take notice of their art form's potential impact on history by using it as a primary source for telling life stories and recording historical events. During the war numerous documentaries were made, capturing both sides of the conflict as well as the experiences of civilians caught in between. For example, the documentary "*Night and Fog*" (1956) directed by Alain Resnais provides a haunting account of the Holocaust, while "*The Battle of Midway*" (1942) directed by John Ford documents the pivotal naval battle between the United States and Japan.

Documentaries can record social history and allow viewers to witness events they may not have experienced themselves or would not have access to otherwise. For instance, the documentary "*Harlan County, USA*" (1976) directed by Barbara Kopple provides an intimate look at the 1973 coal miners' strike in Harlan County, Kentucky, offering insights into the lives of the miners, their social conditions and the challenges they faced.

Documentary also serves to educate, entertain, inform, and serve power. This art form can present a positive image of governmental or state authority and be used as ideological propaganda. Leni Riefenstahl's Nazi-era documentary films, such as "*Triumph of the Will*" (1935) and "*Olympia*" (1938), exemplifies the use of documentaries for propagandistic purposes. "*The East Is Red*" (1965) is a Chinese documentary-style film produced during the Cultural Revolution in China. It was directed by Wang Ping and features a combination of documentary footage and reenactments. The film is known for its propagandistic nature, as it portrays Chairman Mao Zedong as a charismatic and infallible leader. This film showcases large-scale

public events, fervent displays of loyalty to Mao, and praises his leadership and ideology. "The East Is Red" was intended to promote Mao's cult of personality and the supremacy of the Chinese Communist Party, making it a classic example of documentary filmmaking used for ideological and propagandistic purposes.

Documentaries can help us better understand our past and prepare for our future by showing us how things were at certain moments in time—for instance, when a country was going through a difficult period or when there was political unrest. Documentary filmmaking can elaborate on the traditions of portraiture and war art by telling the story in real time, using duration, moving image and linear narrative structures. The ability to bear witness and visually experience the lives of others from an outside perspective can help us empathise with others and see what they might have been feeling at that time.

I am interested in this art form because I believe that the best documentaries shed light on the human condition. The dimensionality of film as a moving image can transport audiences into the lives and communities of persons they may not be familiar with, generating empathy and cross community engagement. This is significant because it demonstrates that documentary films have a key role in generating connection between their subjects and viewers. Stella Bruzzi (Professor of Film and Television Studies at the University of Warwick), in her book *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction* delves into various aspects of documentary filmmaking. It touches on the notion of "documentary as empathy" and how the medium can foster connections between subjects and viewers, ultimately making it a powerful tool for exploring the human condition (Bruzzi, 2006).

Effective documentaries can be both engaging and informative, which makes them an ideal way to connect people with issues that might otherwise seem distant or abstract. For example, the documentary "*An Inconvenient Truth*" (2006) directed by Davis Guggenheim effectively raises awareness about climate change and its impact on the planet. Similarly, "*The Cove*" (2009) directed by Louie Psihoyos exposes the dolphin hunting industry in Japan, creating a call to action for animal rights and conservation. Documentaries also allow for authentic stories to be told through a medium that is accessible to everyone. When these stories are depicted in a way that feels real and relatable, it creates a connection between the audience and the subject matter of the film.

The connection established between the subject matter of a documentary and its audience can have a profound impact. It can lead to significant support for the issue presented in the documentary and motivate individuals to actively engage with that issue in various ways. Whether it's by raising awareness, advocating for change, participating in related activities, or contributing to the cause, this connection can inspire meaningful actions and involvement. To further explore the potential for documentary and essay films as tools for social change, I have chosen to combine it with portraiture and virtual reality technology to document the experiences of my subjects, the Chinese veterans. While documentary films typically aim to present facts, events, or real-life stories, essay films can be more subjective and often incorporate the filmmaker's personal perspective, opinions, and reflections on the subject matter: this is what I hope I have achieved in this project. I decided to use documentary as an art form alongside Chinese portraiture methods to expand the meaning and effect of the representation of my subjects. I am also expanding the form of representation from the still image to the moving image.

As I discussed above, the art form is engaging, affecting and informative, which to me was an ideal way to connect viewers in China and internationally with the issues of Chinese veterans that might otherwise seem distant or abstract. I found that documentaries could allow for authentic stories to be told through a medium that is widely accessible globally. In this research project my intention is for the lives and stories I am depicting to feel real and relatable, and I believe my combining of documentary film alongside the still image achieves this aim.

British social anthropologist Paul Connerton says: “In human society, memory belongs not only to the individual faculties of man, but also to the phenomenon called social memory.” Documentaries are an essential method for retaining and retelling human memory, and war documentaries are one of the collective and historical mediums through which the memory of war can be discussed, explored, and disseminated. It is essential for individuals to confront the past and make a conscious effort to remember the tragic events that afflicted earlier generations and caused them to shed blood and tears. The Canadian scholar Gary Evans (1991) says:

“War is one of the most powerful and spectacle-rich social phenomena in human life, often involving a great deal of dramatic conflict, including life and death decisions, trials of the soul and emotional suffering, and is therefore well suited to film and television.”

Following the conclusion of the Second World War in 1945, a plethora of post-war films were produced that examined, commented upon, or looked back on the events of the conflict. In terms of the narrative form, there were documentaries told from an

objective third-person perspective using a macro viewpoint, and oral history documentaries told from a subjective first-person viewpoint using a micro viewpoint.¹¹ I employed a narrative standpoint that primarily utilized a subjective first-person viewpoint with a micro viewpoint. This approach involved engaging with the veterans themselves, capturing their personal experiences, and presenting their stories in a manner that allowed the audience to connect with the individual narratives, reflecting a more personal and firsthand perspective.

In general, documentaries about World War II tend to focus on the war itself and how it affected different people. Additionally, these films often explore how individuals were impacted by their experiences during this time. For example, they may show soldiers on the battlefield or civilians in their homes dealing with rationing or other wartime conditions. In addition to exploring issues like these, many films also look at

¹¹ The eight-part documentary series *Why We Fought*, produced by an elite team from the US government during World War II, aims to give soldiers an understanding of the reasons for America's involvement in World War II, and the eight-part documentary series *The Great Genocide*, which focuses on the origins, development and implementation of Nazi genocide, is a powerful reflection on Nazi genocidal policies and the evil of genocide. *Apocalypse Now* is a French omniscient World War II documentary made in 2009, featuring black and white World War II footage that has been coloured and digitally restored to give it a clearer colour quality than traditional black and white documentaries. "It is more visually appealing than traditional black and white World War II documentaries. The British documentary *Blonde John* exposes the evils of the so-called "Fountain of Life" programme run by Nazi Germany during World War II, particularly the lifelong trauma of the so-called purebred Germanic children who grew up in this programme. The *Complete History of World War II*, filmed in 1973, was an early omniscient 'World War II' documentary that took advantage of the time available to it by making extensive use of interviews with surviving officers who fought in the war. Claude Lanzmann's 11-year documentary *Shoah*, which took more than nine hours to make, has received numerous accolades since its release in 1985, and is a departure from the usual approach to historical documentaries, abandoning the use of historical images, photographs and physical evidence in its presentation and using contemporaneous interviews with historical subjects and witnesses as its composition. The 2005 documentary *The War of the Century* chronicles the Katyn tragedy that took place in 1942. The BBC documentary *Hiroshima*, set in 1945 when the United States dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima, shows the enormous suffering and devastation caused by the war on both sides, especially on the side that started it.

how people coped with what they experienced during the war. For example, 26-part documentary series narrated by the actor Laurence Olivier *The World at War* (1973): This groundbreaking documentary series provides a comprehensive and in-depth examination of World War II. It features interviews with key figures, archival footage, and personal accounts from soldiers and civilians from various countries involved in the war. "*Shoah*" (1985): Directed by Claude Lanzmann, this nine-hour documentary focuses on the Holocaust and the experiences of survivors, perpetrators, and bystanders. It presents testimonies and explores the historical and moral dimensions of the genocide. "*The Sorrow and the Pity*" (1969): Directed by Marcel Ophüls, this documentary examines the collaboration and resistance during the German occupation of France. It includes interviews with French citizens and explores their reactions to the occupation. "*Night and Fog*" (1956): Directed by Alain Resnais, this short film combines archival footage with present-day views of Holocaust concentration camps. It offers a powerful and haunting exploration of the atrocities committed during the war. "*The Battle of Britain*" (1943): Directed by Frank Capra and William Wyler, this documentary chronicles the air battle between the British Royal Air Force and the German Luftwaffe during the early stages of the war. It showcases the bravery and resilience of the British people. Incorporating elements from these influential documentaries into my work on Chinese veterans allows me to pay homage to their historical significance and draw upon their successful techniques in conveying the human experience during times of conflict. These films provide invaluable lessons on how to effectively portray historical events, individual stories, and the collective human condition in the context of war and conflict.

Oral history documentary is one of the important forms of documentary making. According to American cultural anthropologist Rosaldo (1980), oral history involves

the retelling of personal stories by individuals themselves. Rosaldo emphasises that the methodology employed in this field should pay attention to both "our" tales and "their" stories, as well as the connection between the two narratives. One of the primary goals of oral history, he argues, is to understand the relationship between individuals' experiences and the social contexts in which they occur. Rosaldo asserts that historians should consider how people perceive and live their lives in the present, rather than solely relying on post-event recollections. By adopting this approach, I aimed to create a documentary that not only recounted historical events but also conveyed the richness of the veterans' lived experiences and the evolving relationship between their past and present perspectives. This allowed me to fulfill the goal of oral history as outlined by Rosaldo, providing a deeper understanding of the intricate connection between individual experiences and the social contexts in which they occurred.

Oral histories are interviews with individuals who have firsthand experience of historical events. These interviews are recorded and preserved to provide future generations with insights into those events. For centuries, oral history has served as an important tool for learning about the past. It offers details about daily life during times of conflict that may not be available in written sources. Before the advent of writing, information transmission and recording relied heavily on oral narratives and legends, which served as significant sources of historical knowledge passed down from one generation to another.

In 2007, the Japan Broadcasting Association's NHK Television established the War Testimonies Project Team, which collected the testimonies of over 700 people who lived through the war. Over the course of four years, these testimonies were compiled

into a 51-episode documentary series. The first part, titled "*1937-1944: Frenzy and Despair*," and the second part, "*1944-1945: A Year of Despair*," were broadcast on NHK TV in August 2011¹². This documentary series focuses on the period from the outbreak of the war against Japan to the end of the Pacific War. It features frontline soldiers as well as civilians from the rear. Through the accounts of more than 700 elderly individuals, the series presents a comprehensive view of World War II by capturing their diverse attitudes and feelings towards the war, offering a fragmented yet multi-perspective narrative. In my documentary film on Chinese veterans of the War of Resistance Against Japan, I endeavored to capture a diverse range of perspectives and experiences, much like the NHK Television's War Testimonies Project Team did in their documentary series. While my film and the NHK series focus on different aspects of World War II and target different subjects, the commitment to presenting a multifaceted and multi-perspective narrative is a shared objective.

However, the documentary series has faced international scepticism. While it meets the requirement of having multiple narrators, it fails to solely represent the Japanese perspective on the war, as it may appear self-centric. While the narrators convey the tragedy of war, the reflections and repentance of post-war Japanese people may not be fully understood by the audience. While my documentary primarily focuses on the Chinese perspective, it strives to present a nuanced, multi-perspective narrative that includes diverse voices and acknowledges the broader context of the war. By doing so, I aimed to avoid the potential problem of self-centric representation and foster a more comprehensive understanding of the War of Resistance Against Japan and its lasting impact.

¹² <https://www.nhk.or.jp/archives/en/history01.html> [Accessed 23 August 2023].

American sociologist Paul Connaughton argues that the collective memory of a society serves as a vehicle for preserving and transmitting history. The war memory component of historical memory holds value and significance for community identity. In other words, collective memory plays a crucial role in preserving and transmitting history.

Released in 1956, *"Night and Fog"* was the first colour documentary to juxtapose images of the same locations during and after World War II. Directed by French filmmaker Alain Resnais, the film serves as a reflective documentary on the war. It opens with a serene scene of lush green grass and rusting barbed wire, slowly panning over red-roofed and black-walled buildings. The accompanying narration fades in, stating, "The concentration camp, where the blood has dried, where the throats have been silenced, and where the camera is the only visitor." This scene transitions to black-and-white footage, transporting viewers back to 1933 when the Nazis rose to power, marking the beginning of immense suffering. Through parallel montages, Resnais interweaves real-time footage of the concentration camp with historical footage from World War II, enabling viewers to constantly shift between reality and history, engaging in a continuous process of cognitive memory alteration and reconstruction. By juxtaposing the veterans' testimonies with historical footage, I aimed to create a sense of connection between the personal experiences of the veterans and the broader historical narrative. While I did not use parallel montages to the same extent as Resnais, I strived to engage viewers in a continuous process of cognitive memory alteration and reconstruction. This was achieved by weaving together the veterans' recollections with archival images and documents, allowing viewers to connect the individual narratives with the broader historical events. While

the specific techniques and objectives may differ from "Night and Fog," my documentary film incorporated elements of parallel montages and interweaving footage to foster a deeper understanding of the human experiences during the War of Resistance Against Japan and the historical context in which these experiences unfolded.

Adam Curtis (born 1955) is a renowned British documentary filmmaker known for his thought-provoking and critically acclaimed works exploring the intersection of politics, history, and power dynamics in contemporary society. His documentaries have greatly inspired and influenced my creative work. His use of archival footage, thought-provoking narratives, and fearless exploration of complex topics have shaped my approach to documentary filmmaking.

One element that has deeply resonated with me is Curtis' skilful juxtaposition of historical footage. In his documentary "*The Power of Nightmares* (2004) ," he blends archival clips from various sources to expose the parallels between the rise of radical Islamism and the rise of neoconservatism in the United States. This approach has inspired me to incorporate archival materials in my own documentaries to provide historical context and engage viewers on a profound level.

Curtis' narratives also challenge mainstream perspectives. In his documentary "*Hyper Normalisation* (2016)," he presents a compelling alternative view of modern society, exploring the concept of "fake news" and the manipulation of reality. This has motivated me to critically examine prevailing narratives and seek out alternative perspectives in my own storytelling. I was inspired by Curtis' approach to challenge mainstream perspectives and explore alternative viewpoints. In my documentary, the

inclusion of these less explored perspectives contributes to a more nuanced and holistic understanding of the wartime experience.

Moreover, Curtis fearlessly tackles controversial subjects. In "*The Century of the Self* (2002) ," he explores the impact of psychological techniques in shaping consumer culture and political manipulation. This has encouraged me to confront difficult topics in my documentaries, addressing issues that are often overlooked or marginalised.

Curtis' storytelling techniques have also influenced my approach. In "*All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace* (2011)," he weaves together narratives from different realms, such as ecology and technology, to challenge our understanding of the interconnectedness of these systems. This has inspired me to craft narratives that engage audiences emotionally and intellectually, encouraging critical thinking and a reevaluation of commonly held beliefs.

In summary, Adam Curtis' documentaries, such as "*The Power of Nightmares* (2004)," "*Hyper Normalisation* (2016)," "*The Century of the Self* (2002)," and "*All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace* (2011)," have served as valuable examples in my creative journey. His use of archival footage, alternative narratives, exploration of controversial topics, and compelling storytelling techniques have influenced my own documentary filmmaking, empowering me to create thought-provoking narratives that challenge prevailing perspectives and inspire critical engagement. In my documentary, I was motivated to seek out and amplify lesser-known stories and perspectives from Chinese veterans. By doing so, I aimed to shed light on aspects of the war that are not commonly explored in mainstream historical accounts. This approach encouraged viewers to consider a broader and more nuanced understanding

of the conflict.

The "*Prisons Memory Archive*" (by Jolene Mairs Dyer, Conor McCafferty, Cahal McLaughlin, 2004-2021) is an initiative that focuses on collecting oral histories and documenting the experiences of individuals who have been affected by the prison system, within the context of the Northern Irish conflict, which lasted from the late 1960s to the late 1990s. The Archive aims to preserve and share the individual stories through a digital archive, which includes interviews, photographs, documents, and artwork related to raising awareness and fostering understanding about the impact of imprisonment on individuals and society in post-conflict Northern Ireland. The archive serves as a platform for raising awareness, building understanding, and encouraging critical discussions about the impact of prisons on individuals and society.

The "*Prisons Memory Archive*" inspired and influenced my project. One aspect that particularly stands out is the emphasis on collecting oral histories. I have drawn inspiration from the approach of the Archive and I have incorporated personal narratives and firsthand accounts into my own work. The technique of the Archive in recording individual stories was to allow the subject to speak without interruption and without prompting. I have used the same technique in my record interviews. By interviewing individuals with relevant experiences or conducting oral history research, I have brought an authentic and human perspective to my project.

Another element that resonates with me is the use of visual documentation in the archive. The inclusion of photographs, documents, and artwork inspires me to explore incorporating visual elements into my project. By integrating photographs,

illustrations, or other visuals, I have enhanced the storytelling and provided a visual context for my audience.

Additionally, the multimodal presentation of the "*Prisons Memory Archive*" is intriguing. It has encouraged me to experiment with different media formats such as video, audio, text and VR to create a dynamic and engaging experience for viewers. By incorporating video interviews, audio recordings, or interactive elements, I have tried to offer a diverse and immersive encounter with my project.

The reflective and critical approach of the archive is also something I aimed to embrace. Like the "*Prisons Memory Archive*," I intended my project to prompt viewers to reflect, question, and critically examine the subject matter. By fostering public understanding and encouraging thoughtful discussions, my work can contribute to raising awareness about the topic at hand.

Lastly, the accessibility and outreach provided by the digital nature of the "*Prisons Memory Archive*" is inspiring. I intend to leverage digital platforms and technology to make my project widely accessible to a diverse audience. Through online platforms, social media, or interactive websites, I can extend the reach and impact of my work beyond physical limitations.

By incorporating elements such as oral histories, visual documentation, multimodal presentation, a reflective approach, and accessible digital platforms, my project is uniquely shaped by the inspiration drawn from the "*Prisons Memory Archive*."

While traditional documentary filmmaking relies on techniques such as interviews,

archival footage, and observational filming to portray various subjects and events, my project seeks to push the boundaries of conventional documentary filmmaking. By incorporating elements of oral history, visual storytelling and poetic narration, my approach expands on but also resonates with traditional Chinese artistic traditions. The fusion of these techniques aims to evoke a deeper emotional and cultural connection with the subject matter.

Documentary filmmaking grapples with an enduring tension between the ideals of objectivity and subjectivity. The debate revolves around the elusive quest for an impartial portrayal of reality versus embracing the filmmaker's perspective as a creative force.

Objectivity, envisioning filmmakers as neutral observers, has faced critique for its illusory nature, acknowledging that biases inevitably shape the narrative. On the flip side, subjectivity champions the filmmaker's viewpoint as a vital element, allowing for more authentic and emotionally resonant storytelling.

These debates significantly influence aesthetic choices. American film critic and theoretician Bill Nichols (2017) in his book *Introduction to Documentary* explores the concept of objectivity and subjectivity in documentary filmmaking, discussing how filmmakers navigate these tensions and the implications for their artistic choices. He pointed out that from the narrative voice to cinematic techniques, ethical considerations to editing strategies, filmmakers must navigate the delicate balance between objective representation and the intentional injection of subjectivity. The result is not a limitation but a guiding compass, shaping documentaries that authentically engage with their subjects while provoking critical thought and emotional impact.

In my documentary filmmaking project, I grappled with the tension between objectivity and subjectivity, recognizing their influence on my aesthetic choices. Here's how these ideas influenced my approach and aesthetic choices:

Narrative Voice: Instead of adopting a purely objective or subjective narrative voice, I aimed for a balanced approach. While presenting factual information, I also allowed for the subjective experiences of the individuals featured in the documentary to shine through. This meant incorporating personal anecdotes and emotions alongside objective facts to create a richer and more nuanced narrative.

Cinematic Techniques: In terms of cinematic techniques, I employed a mix of observational footage and interviews. This allowed me to capture authentic moments as they unfolded while also providing insights into the subjective experiences and perspectives of the participants. Additionally, I experimented with visual metaphors and symbolism to convey deeper layers of meaning beyond the surface level of the story.

Ethical Considerations: Keeping ethical considerations in mind, I ensured that the portrayal of subjects was respectful and dignified. While acknowledging the subjective nature of filmmaking, I made efforts to minimize biases and present a fair representation of all perspectives involved.

Editing Strategies: During the editing process, I carefully balanced the need for coherence and flow with the desire to preserve authenticity and rawness. This meant making difficult decisions about what to include and what to leave out, always striving to maintain the integrity of the story while also acknowledging the subjective lens through which it was being told.

Overall, I approached my documentary project with an awareness of the tension between objectivity and subjectivity. Rather than viewing this tension as a limitation, I embraced it as a guiding compass, allowing it to inform my aesthetic choices and ultimately shape the documentary into a compelling and emotionally resonant piece of storytelling.

In conclusion, by analysing the genre of documentary film, we can observe its powerful impact and its relevance to my project which innovative approach, drawing inspiration from traditional Chinese artistic traditions, expands the boundaries of conventional documentary filmmaking, creating a unique and evocative narrative style.

As I will show in Section 2: Critical review of the process of the research subject, in my project, I employed visual metaphors, symbolic imagery, and carefully composed frames to evoke emotions, capture the essence of the subjects, and convey deeper layers of meaning. Using poetic narration, I aimed to engage the audience on a more contemplative level, inviting them to reflect and interpret the stories presented in the documentary.

By adopting this unique approach, my documentary film stands apart from conventional narratives, offering viewers an immersive and introspective journey. Through the fusion of traditional Chinese aesthetics and modern storytelling techniques, I aimed to create a cinematic experience that resonates with audiences on both an emotional and intellectual level.

Furthermore, by exploring subjects and narratives that are often overlooked or

marginalised, my documentary aimed to shed light on the untold stories and amplify the voices of individuals who are typically underrepresented in mainstream media. Through this approach, I sought to challenge preconceived notions, provoke critical thinking, and foster empathy and understanding.

In conclusion, my project represents a departure from traditional documentary filmmaking approaches by integrating elements of traditional Chinese artistic traditions, visual metaphors, and poetic narration. Through this unique exploration and combination, I aim to create a immersive experience that goes beyond mere documentation, capturing the essence of the subjects and inviting viewers to engage with the stories on a deeper level. By pushing the boundaries of the documentary form and infusing it with visual elements, I aspire to contribute to the evolution of documentary filmmaking and inspire fellow filmmakers to explore innovative approaches in storytelling.

2.4 Virtual Reality

In this chapter, I will discuss the implications of virtual reality (VR) on the production of art, focusing on its potential for engaging with portraiture and documentary and how I use it in this research project. VR not only expands the reach of my project to new audiences but also enhances the expression and representation of my subjects, the Chinese veterans.

VR has emerged as a popular and innovative medium for artists seeking to explore new artistic strategies and approaches. Unlike traditional methods of artistic expression, VR offers a unique experience by integrating various forms of media, such as still and

moving images, audio, and video, to create a more immersive result.

VR is a simulated 3D environment aimed at creating a virtual world that immerses users and allows them to interact with that world. By employing specific equipment, such as headsets, goggles, or gloves, VR simulates an environment and provides feedback to make the experience as authentic as possible. It offers an interactive computer-generated experience where users can engage with the content through their body movements, providing a more embodied, immersive, and interactive experience that deepens the viewer's physical, emotional, and intellectual engagement.

VR is recognised for its transformative impact on the art world. According to industry expert Jeremy Bailenson (2007), founding director of Stanford University's Virtual Human Interaction Lab, "Virtual reality provides an unprecedented opportunity for artists to create experiences that transcend traditional boundaries of time, space, and perspective."

Thomas Fuchs, a professor at the University of Heidelberg states that: "human empathy is not bound to immediate intercorporeal contact, but becomes a crucial medium of virtual relations as well, albeit at the risk of projecting fictional emotions." (Fuchs, 2014). Noteworthy examples further illustrate the potential of VR in art. The VR experience "*The Night Café: A Tribute to Vincent Van Gogh*," (2016)¹³ developed by Borrowed Light Studios, transports users into the iconic paintings of Van Gogh, allowing them to navigate and interact within his vibrant and expressive world. Through this immersive encounter, viewers can gain a heightened appreciation for Van Gogh's artistic vision and emotional depth.

¹³ https://store.steampowered.com/app/482390/The_Night_Cafe_A_VR_Tribute_to_Vincent_Van_Gogh/ [Accessed 20 August 2023].

Another notable example is the collaboration between artist Olafur Eliasson and Acute Art, resulting in "*Rainbow*," (2006-2011)¹⁴ a virtual reality artwork. This interactive installation invites participants to explore a fantastical environment where they can shape and manipulate colourful particles with their gestures.

Moreover, VR has the power to facilitate cross-cultural encounters. The VR project "*The Enemy*" (2017)¹⁵ by photographer and filmmaker Karim Ben Khelifa enables viewers to virtually engage with combatants from different conflict zones, offering a deeper understanding of their experiences, motivations, and shared humanity. By breaking down geographical barriers, VR opens possibilities for empathy, dialogue, and connection through art.

These quotes from industry experts, along with specific examples like "*The Night Café*" and "*Rainbow*," highlight the transformative nature of VR in the art world. They demonstrate how VR can transcend traditional artistic boundaries, enable immersive and interactive encounters, and foster cross-cultural understanding. Incorporating such quotes and examples enriches the discussion and emphasises the potential of VR as a powerful tool for artistic expression and engagement. VR artworks such as "*The Night Café*" have shown how this medium can transcend traditional artistic boundaries. As an artist, I would be inspired to think beyond the constraints of two-dimensional or static art forms. The use of VR opens up new possibilities for creating interactive and three-dimensional experiences that challenge the conventional norms of art.

¹⁴ <https://olafureliasson.net/artwork/your-rainbow-panorama-2006-2011/> [Accessed 20 August 2023].

¹⁵ <http://theenemyishere.org/> [Accessed 20 August 2023].

To provide an objective and specific description of VR, industry expert Jaron Lanier, founder of VPL Research¹⁶, defined virtual reality in the mid-1980s while developing the necessary equipment for experiencing this technology. He aimed to create a computer-generated environment that could be explored in three dimensions by moving within it, engaging all the senses of the user. Although VR has primarily been associated with gaming, its use for viewing art has been on the rise in recent years. The influence of gaming techniques and the broader adoption of VR for art are part of the evolving landscape of VR's applications. Artists and creators have been drawn to VR for its potential to engage audiences in novel and immersive ways, whether in the context of viewing art, storytelling, or other forms of creative expression.

For example, in 2018, Serbian conceptual and performance artist Marina Abramović's VR project "*Rising*" (Figure 19) addressed the impact of climate change by immersing viewers in a virtual space where they witness rising sea levels¹⁷. Through an immersive headset, viewers enter an intimate virtual setting where they come face-to-face with the artist herself, submerged in a glass tank filling with water from her waist to her neck. The project utilised motion capture technology to create a realistic avatar of Abramović, capturing her unique facial expressions. By embracing new technology, "*Rising*" allows users to directly interact with the artist virtually, regardless of their physical location.

Moreover, VR technology has facilitated various ways of engaging with artwork beyond mere observation. For instance, it can transport users inside a painting, enabling them to explore it up close. It can also create virtual reality versions of

¹⁶ VPL Research was one of the first companies that developed and sold virtual reality products. It was founded by computer scientist Jaron Lanier in 1984. "VPL" stood for "Virtual Programming Languages". In 1990, VPL Research filed for bankruptcy and in 1999 all of its patents were bought by Sun Microsystems.

¹⁷ <https://acuteart.com/artist/marina-abramovic/> [Accessed 20 August 2023].

museums, providing different angles and perspectives for viewing artworks. Additionally, VR allows users to experience an artist's creative process by immersing them in a 3D model of the artist's studio or home. These examples illustrate how VR has opened doors for artists to create immersive experiences that can be enjoyed anywhere with a virtual reality headset. Incorporating these VR features, my project successfully provides immersive art experiences, allowing users to explore paintings up close, navigate virtual museums, and engage with artists' creative processes through 3D models of the space.



Fig 19. Marina Abramović. 2018. *Rising*.

VR has also emerged as a groundbreaking technology utilised by museums to offer more engaging and immersive experiences for their visitors. By incorporating VR into their exhibitions, museums have allowed visitors to explore paintings in a three-dimensional environment, breaking free from the confines of traditional flat images. Furthermore, advancements in technology have enabled the integration of VR

experiences into websites, granting online viewers the opportunity to engage with VR from their personal computers.

In my VR project, users could explore paintings in a three-dimensional environment, allowing them to move closer to the artwork, view it from different angles, and gain a sense of depth and dimensionality that goes beyond traditional flat images. This feature brought the paintings to life and provided a more interactive and immersive viewing experience. The VR environment allowed users to break free from the confines of traditional flat images. They could navigate and interact with the artworks as if they were physically present in a museum or gallery, fostering a greater sense of connection with the art. Advancements in technology enabled the integration of VR experiences into websites, making it possible for online viewers to engage with VR directly from their personal computers. This accessibility broadened the reach of the VR art experience, allowing a wider audience to access and enjoy the immersive content without the need for specialized VR equipment.

Similarly, the objective of my project is to revolutionise the way we perceive and interact with portraiture. By leveraging virtual reality, I aim to provide users with the ability to directly engage with portraits and expand the functionality of this art form. This unprecedented level of interactivity will enable viewers to intimately connect with their favourite two-dimensional images and gain a deeper understanding of them. Through my project, I endeavour to explore portraiture through the combined lenses of painting, photography, and virtual reality, expanding the scope and significance of my portrayals of war veterans.

The act of viewing a painting traditionally offers a connection to the artist's intention

and perspective, albeit within the confines of a singular viewpoint. However, with the incorporation of virtual reality technology, I discovered the potential to create an interactive and immersive experience that allows viewers to engage with art from multiple perspectives, through multiple modes of viewing and experiencing. This immersive approach has provided me with fresh insights into the meaning behind portraiture. Virtual reality enables users to interact with objects in ways that were previously impossible with traditional media. For instance, while a painting on a wall can only be viewed from one side, VR technology allows users to freely move around the artwork, even rotating it to gain a comprehensive view from all angles simultaneously thus expanding the meaning and affect of the work.

Scott Delahunta, Professor of Dance, Centre for Dance Research, Coventry University (UK), he highlights, virtual reality grants audiences the opportunity to engage with artistic creations through a three-dimensional computer-generated environment. Delahunta notes that virtual reality users can navigate freely within these constructed environments, allowing for exploration and investigation of surroundings while experiencing a novel and embodied way of perceiving artwork (Delahunta, 2002). This newfound freedom offers artists the ability to design spaces in which spectators can roam and interact with their surroundings, providing an entirely fresh perspective and expanded on the artwork. Additionally, virtual reality transcends geographical limitations, enabling individuals from all over the world to interact with the same piece of art simultaneously, regardless of their location.

The decision to merge portraiture, documentary photography, and virtual reality in my project stems from this realisation and from the research I undertook. VR technology facilitates a unique experience for both the artist and the viewer. Artists can express

themselves in ways that surpass the limitations of traditional media, creating boundless worlds and presenting their work in immersive ways. For viewers, VR offers a transformative journey into another realm, where they can interact with art in ways previously limited to physical museum or gallery spaces. As a result of living through the Covid pandemic, this became an important motivation for me in creating the VR space for my project. Museums and galleries were closed or restricted so VR was the perfect platform to disseminate this project.

My aspiration is for viewers to step inside my project using VR headsets and immerse themselves in the world of my subjects, who have faced societal marginalisation in their lives. Through this experience, viewers will witness how others perceive and treat these individuals, providing a glimpse beyond their own perspective. As they traverse through my virtual space, they will gain a heightened awareness of the world around them. Virtual reality proves to be an effective medium as it enables viewers to immerse themselves in the environment I have created while retaining control over their experience, fostering a novel and engaging connection between myself and my audience.

In recent years, virtual reality technology has undergone rapid development. Benefiting from advancements in computer image processing, mobile computing, spatial positioning, and human-computer interaction, VR is increasingly permeating people's lives. It has become a new technology and medium that alters the way individuals perceive the world, expands their imagination, and stimulates new artistic approaches and concepts. Kate Nash, a professor at University of Leeds, pointed that: “A key issue for VR makers is spatial storytelling. As a medium, VR may have more in common with theatre than it does with documentary’s primary history as an

audio-visual practice. The relationship between nonfiction theatre, reality-based performance and documentary filmmaking is bound to be increasingly significant as documentary-relevant VR practices develop.” (Nash, 2018)

From a broader perspective, the emergence of virtual reality (VR) is not an isolated occurrence. Throughout history, art has assumed various forms, all of which have simulated reality and depicted dreams in a virtual manner, offering people countless possibilities. Different artistic mediums have shaped reality in diverse ways, and the evolution of art has increasingly been influenced by technology. Professor of Documentary & Digital Cultures, UWE Bristol, Mandy Rose (2018) pointed out that in the realm of VR, the conventional screen fades away as the viewer transcends into the virtual world. In this immersive experience, the viewer is not merely an observer but an active participant, engaging with the environment using their entire body. This unprecedented level of realism and immersion fundamentally enhances the freedom of the artistic communication process.

VR introduces a new dimension and a broader creative space to the arts, yet it also presents significant challenges. New media cannot wholly discard the old rules of art but should build upon them and expand the means of expression with the aid of new technologies. Numerous artists such as Olafur Eliasson, Laurie Anderson, Marina Abramović, have already ventured into creating art projects utilising virtual reality, as I have done with this project.

The illusion of physically inhabiting a nonphysical realm is achieved through spatial immersion in virtual reality. This perception is shaped by enveloping the user of the VR system with visual, auditory, and other stimuli, creating a deeply captivating

experience. Spatial immersion occurs when a player finds the simulated environment perceptually convincing, perceiving it as authentic and "real," and genuinely feeling present within it (Freina & Ott, 2015). Virtual reality can be harnessed to craft immersive environments that enable viewers to interact with artwork in ways that would otherwise be impossible.

Irish artist Elaine Hoey's "*The Weight of Water*"¹⁸ is a notable example of an immersive art work and animation that merges virtual reality and game technology to address the global refugee crisis (Murphy, 2017). This project demonstrates the potential of VR as a medium to engage viewers in pressing social issues. By immersing participants in a virtual environment, "*The Weight of Water*" brings the viewer on a journey in an unstable refugee boat on a dangerous crossing of the Mediterranean sea allowing them to experience and confront the challenges faced by refugees, thereby fostering empathy and understanding.

Ai Weiwei's debut virtual reality video titled "*Omni*"¹⁹ offers another compelling case study. This project combines two films by the artist, shedding light on international migration issues and immersing viewers in the tumultuous experiences of displacement and exile for both animals and humans (Needham and Hattenstone, 2020). Using virtual reality, Ai Weiwei creates an immersive narrative that captures the emotional impact of the forced migration of a group of animals and humans. By allowing viewers to step into the shoes of those affected by displacement, "*Omni*" invites a deeper exploration of the linked conditions of human and animal and encourages empathy towards both communities.

¹⁸ <https://www.elainehoey.com/textweight> [Accessed 20 August 2023].

¹⁹ <https://acuteart.com/watch-omni-a-new-vr-film-by-ai-weiwei/> [Accessed 20 August 2023].

Both Elaine Hoey and Ai Weiwei's VR projects demonstrate how virtual reality can be utilised as a powerful tool for artistic expression and social commentary. By immersing viewers in virtual environments, these artists effectively engage their audience in thought-provoking narratives, fostering empathy and understanding for pressing global issues. Their works serve as inspiring examples of the potential of VR to create impactful and immersive experiences, aligning with the goals of my project to provide a new perspective on portraiture and encourage viewers to engage with marginalised individuals and groups.

First and foremost, VR technology has revolutionised the way stories are told and experienced. It has the unique ability to transport individuals to different locations, eras, and perspectives, enabling a sense of presence and immersion that traditional media often cannot achieve. By utilising this technology, in my project I sought to provide viewers with a firsthand encounter of the veterans' experiences, transporting them to the sites and situations that shaped these individuals' lives. This immersive approach enhances the emotional impact of the narratives, fostering recognition and responsiveness with a more profound understanding of their struggles and triumphs.

Furthermore, VR allows for a dynamic and interactive storytelling experience. Viewers are not passive observers but active participants in the narrative. They have the agency to explore the virtual environments, engage with the veterans' stories, and make their own discoveries. This participatory aspect fosters a sense of empowerment and engagement, encouraging viewers to reflect on the themes presented and form their own connections with the subject matter. By placing the audience at the centre of the experience, VR technology enhances the project's impact and facilitates a more personal and meaningful engagement with the veterans' stories.

Moreover, the development of VR technology has made it more accessible and versatile. It is no longer confined to specialised equipment or limited to specific platforms. VR experiences can now be accessed through a variety of devices, such as smartphones or stand alone headsets, reaching a broader audience. This accessibility opens new avenues for sharing these narratives and creating dialogue on a global scale. Additionally, VR offers opportunities for collaboration and interdisciplinary engagement. The merging of art, technology, and storytelling allows for the integration of various creative disciplines, fostering innovation and pushing the boundaries of traditional mediums. For example, *The Night Café* (2015) - Inspired by Vincent van Gogh's artwork, this virtual reality experience enables users to enter the scene depicted in the painting and actively explore and interact with the environment.

In summary, my project's utilisation of VR technology holds tremendous potential. It harnesses the immersive and interactive nature of VR to transport viewers into the veterans' worlds, fostering empathy and understanding. The dynamic and participatory nature of VR storytelling empowers viewers to form personal connections with the narratives, enhancing the project's impact. Furthermore, the increasing accessibility and versatility of VR technology facilitate broader dissemination and collaboration, expanding the reach and potential of the project. By embracing VR as a medium for storytelling, I have unlocked new possibilities to engage audiences, evoke emotional responses, and shed light on the experiences of Chinese veterans in a truly unique and meaningful way.

Chapter 3 Discussion on the Importance of Marginalised Communities in Artistic Creation and Artistic Expression as a Platform for Marginalised Voices

In contemporary societies across the world, there are numerous marginalised groups that deserve equality of attention and recognition for their significant contributions and for the purposes of sharing their lived experience. One such marginalised group in mainland China are the veterans of the Kuomintang (KMT) who fought against the Japanese during World War II. These individuals, who bravely defended their homeland and sacrificed their youth for the cause of freedom, have been overlooked and marginalised in the narratives of history in China and worldwide.

The KMT veterans played a crucial role in the resistance against Japan during the war. Their heroic efforts and sacrifices should not be forgotten or diminished. However, due to complex political factors and the subsequent civil war in China, these veterans found themselves on the losing side, and their stories were overshadowed by the victory of the Communist Party. As a result, they have been marginalised and their experiences diminished and forgotten in the historical narrative.

Today, it is essential to reexamine the significance of these marginalised groups, such as the KMT veterans. First and foremost, recognising their contributions and sacrifices can help promote a more comprehensive understanding of history. By acknowledging the diverse perspectives and experiences of all parties involved in the war, we can create a more nuanced and accurate historical narrative. This inclusivity allows us to appreciate the complexity of the past and learn valuable lessons for the present and future.

Furthermore, reevaluating the significance of marginalised groups like the KMT veterans aligns with the pursuit of peace and opposition to war. By highlighting the devastating consequences of armed conflicts, we can emphasise the importance of peaceful resolutions to conflicts and promote a culture of dialogue and understanding. The stories of these veterans serve as reminders of the horrors of war and the price paid by individuals and communities caught in its grip. Their experiences provide valuable insights into the lasting impact of war on human lives, urging us to strive for peaceful coexistence and conflict resolution.

Moreover, paying attention to marginalised groups fosters social justice and inclusivity. It reminds us of the diversity and complexity of society, challenging prevailing narratives that may overlook or depreciate certain groups. By giving voice to excluded groups or individuals, we can promote a more equitable society that values the contributions and perspectives of all its members. In the case of the KMT veterans, their stories shed light on a chapter of history that has often been neglected, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the war and its aftermath.

In contemporary society, there are numerous other marginalised groups that require similar attention and understanding. From indigenous communities to refugees, from ethnic minorities to victims of various forms of discrimination, these groups often face marginalisation, exclusion, and the erasure of their stories. By recognising and amplifying their experiences, we can create a more inclusive society that respects and values the diversity of its members.

Moreover, reevaluating the significance of marginalised groups like the KMT

veterans has implications for intergenerational understanding and reconciliation. Many of these veterans, despite their marginalised status, have persevered and carried the memories and legacies of their wartime experiences. By acknowledging their sacrifices and engaging in meaningful dialogue with them, we can bridge the gap between different generations and foster a sense of unity and empathy.

For younger generations, learning about the experiences of marginalised groups can be a powerful tool in cultivating empathy and promoting peace. Understanding the struggles and resilience of these individuals serves as a reminder of the human cost of war and the importance of preserving peace. It allows younger generations to connect with the past and gain a deeper appreciation for the freedoms and opportunities they enjoy today.

Furthermore, re-examining the significance of marginalised groups challenges prevailing narratives and stereotypes. It encourages critical thinking and the questioning of dominant historical discourses. By shedding light on the experiences and perspectives of marginalised individuals, we can challenge the simplification of history and promote a more nuanced understanding of complex events.

In today's interconnected world, where conflicts and tensions persist, the reevaluation of marginalised groups takes on global relevance. It reminds us of the urgent need for dialogue, understanding, and cooperation among nations and cultures. By recognising the humanity and dignity of all individuals, regardless of their background, we can strive for peaceful resolutions to conflicts and work towards a more harmonious and inclusive global community.

The encounter between the viewers and the veterans, facilitated by virtual reality technology, becomes a space where empathy and ethics converge. It prompts viewers to confront the human faces and stories behind the historical events, challenging them to consider their own ethical stance in relation to the veterans' experiences. The immersive nature of virtual reality enhances this encounter, creating a deeply personal and emotionally resonant experience that can evoke empathy and a heightened sense of ethical awareness.

In conclusion, the revaluation of marginalised groups, such as the KMT veterans, is vital for several reasons. It promotes a more comprehensive understanding of history, fosters a culture of peace and empathy, encourages social justice and inclusivity, facilitates intergenerational understanding and reconciliation, challenges prevailing narratives, and has global relevance in promoting dialogue and cooperation. By shining a light on these marginalised voices, we can work towards a more just and peaceful society, where the lessons of the past inform a brighter future for all.

Conclusion

In conclusion, my project attempts to apply artistic innovation and contemporary methods of artistic exploration within the realm of traditional portraiture. By integrating traditional Chinese portrait painting, documentary filmmaking, and VR technology, I have expanded the boundaries of portraiture by combining media and methods and I have explored the expressive possibilities of modern communications technology in relationship to ancient methods of representation.

Throughout history, human portraiture has evolved, becoming more sophisticated and encompassing not only the depiction of an individual physical appearance, background information, along with social, political and geographical contexts. This holistic approach is commonly employed by documentary filmmakers who aim to provide a comprehensive portrayal of their subjects' lives. By utilising representational and contextual techniques of portraiture, filmmakers can capture the fuller story of an individual's life with the inclusion of many intricate details, without compromising certain aspects or omitting others.

In recent years, the use of VR technology has become a mainstream tool in communications technology and gaming in particular, offering viewers an immersive experience that transports them to another world effortlessly. VR offers new possibilities and potentials for representation of human life and experience. It offers the potential to expand viewers' perspectives of life, society and the role of art. It exists as a new artistic tool, not yet fully tested or manifested as an art medium but promising many new artistic possibilities. Within my project, I bring together the application and synthesis of two established art forms and this new one: traditional

Chinese portrait painting, documentary filmmaking, and VR technology.

Traditional Chinese portrait painting holds significant historical and cultural importance, serving as a milestone commemoration. Documentary filmmaking acts as a photographic record, capturing the present state of individuals and their stories. VR technology, on the other hand, provides a simulated experience that allows users to immerse themselves in a virtual world, enabling viewers to engage with distant spaces and experiences.

The uniqueness of my project lies in its intention to portray subjects in a multidimensional manner by combining these modes of classical portraiture, video documentary, and VR. Through extensive research, I have not encountered other artists who have brought together these art forms or applied them to the same project. By merging these three forms, I demonstrate how the juxtaposition and combination of art forms enables us to transcend our own perceptions of time and space, providing an immersive experience that deepens our understanding of ourselves and our relationships with others.

Art and society are intricately intertwined, continuously shaping, and influencing one another. Artists reflect and react to society by participating in it, creating artistic works that contribute to the development and evolution of civilisation. During times of war, art has played a significant role in representing, reflecting upon and denouncing the atrocities committed, showcasing various often conflicting perspectives, and moving people to action. By utilising portraiture in the context of war, artists have created works that convey political messages, personal expressions, and reflections on the atrocity of war and the importance of peace.

Within the context of the Second World War, artists used their works to address the horrors of battle, to express and communicate their experiences of war. In this research project, I have also attempted to examine and explore a specific historical war, the Second Sino-Japanese war and its aftermath, with an emphasis on a group of Chinese veterans who were involved. I seek to reclaim their status through my artistic practice of expanded portraiture, this approach aids in representing their experiences on multiple levels, simultaneously revealing intimate aspects of their lives in relation to their histories as soldiers in this war.

Over seventy years have passed since the end of the Second World War, yet the divergent interpretations and memories of the war held by different nations hinder the stability and development of international relationships. Using various narrative forms, including documentary filmmaking, the reconstruction of collective memory becomes possible. World War II documentaries, as dominant visual media, have shaped people's understanding and perceptions of the war, influencing the way it is remembered.

In addition to its artistic value, my project acknowledges the cultural significance associated with wartime events and aims to provide an objective and comprehensive collective memory. By leveraging visual media, spoken language, and immersive experiences offered by VR technology to portray and allow these veterans to tell their stories, I have sought to shape the reconstruction of people's memories of the war, challenging their understanding and perceptions.

In conclusion, my project represents a personal journey of artistic exploration and

social commentary. By integrating traditional portraiture, documentary filmmaking, and VR technology, I have created a multi-dimensional artistic endeavour that goes beyond the boundaries of conventional portraiture. This project holds significant academic and societal value, amplifying the voices of marginalised individuals, promoting social change, and fostering a deeper understanding of our shared humanity. It contributes not only to the field of art but also engages with broader historical, societal, and cultural contexts, forging a path towards a more inclusive and empathetic future.

Section 2

Critical review of the process of the research subject

Chapter 4 Critical Evaluation of the Research Process

In Chapter 1, I introduced the projects I have undertaken before 2019, which involved various groups with shared cultural, historical, and social characteristics, including Taiwanese veterans, individuals from Lhasa, Muslims from Xinjiang, and new immigrants in Edinburgh. I also explored the use of documentary video in representing the lives of my subjects. These projects laid the foundation for this PhD research project exploring group portraiture of Chinese veterans and its role in promoting social harmony and inter-cultural understanding. Since arriving in Ireland in 2019 and beginning my practice based PhD programme, I have embarked on a comprehensive investigation of the possibilities of expanded portraiture under the guidance of my supervisors.

During the initial and subsequent years of my doctoral program, I commenced my research by creating portraits of friends, classmates, and teachers using traditional Chinese portrait painting techniques on silk (Figure 20). Alongside these paintings, I invited my subjects to provide written narratives that would be included on the painted portraits. These short narratives or life stories offered personal insights and perspectives. on the uniqueness of each individual and their lives. The exhibition of these artworks in Ireland²⁰ elicited valuable feedback from viewers, who expressed a keen interest in the traditional Chinese portrait style and recognised the antique

²⁰ «Portrait of Beckett» Westival Virtual Gallery, Westival Ireland 2020

«Portrait of Duaa» Refiguring the Portrait, NUI Galway Art Gallery, Ireland, 2020.

«Portrait» "A Sisyphean Task"-- New Work by PhD Students from Burren College of Art. Galway. Ireland, 2020

«Portrait» New Artistic Research, Burren College of Art, Galway. Ireland, 2021

aesthetic conveyed through my line work and colour choices. Through engaging with these visual portraits and reading the accompanying narratives, the audience gained a multifaceted and deeper understanding of the diverse thoughts and experiences of each individual portrayed.



Fig 20. Qi Chen. 2020. *Portrait in Galway*. Chinese ink on silk. 33cm*44cm.

This process helped me to recognise the intrinsic relationship between storytelling and portraiture. While two-dimensional portraits alone may not fully convey the depth of a person's story, the inclusion of textual records enhanced the viewer's understanding of each person, provided contextual information, adding new dimensions and breathing life into the artwork. Thus, in the third year of my doctoral program, under the guidance of my supervisors, I delved deeper into expanding the boundaries of

portraiture. I had added a new dimension to this series of portraits through the inclusion of the written narratives, helping to communicate additional information of each individual. So in approaching my final project, representing the Chinese veterans of the Second Sino-Japanese War, I decided to complement the painted portraits with the use of documentary filmmaking, capturing footage that provides a visual record of the subjects and their stories.

Simultaneously, I became increasingly aware of the ageing population of Chinese veterans of the second world war, some of whom I had previously assisted. Recognising the urgency to preserve their stories and capture their likeness, I decided to redirect my focus. It is important to note that these veterans were former members of the Kuomintang (KMT) who actively participated in the Chinese resistance against Japan during World War II. However, due to political reasons, they faced varying degrees of persecution in mainland China and gradually became marginalised within society²¹. In response to this historical context, I undertook extensive visits to China, to the remote regions where they lived and conducted in-depth interviews, capturing documentary footage, and creating painted portraits. The primary objective was to document their experiences and struggles while they are still alive, shedding light on their unique narratives and the challenges they have faced as a marginalised group.

Moreover, the appearance and evolution of virtual reality (VR) technology alongside the restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic motivated me to explore innovative ways of sharing these veterans' stories with a wider audience. Leveraging

²¹ The marginalization of Chinese veterans of the Kuomintang (KMT), who actively participated in the Chinese resistance against Japan during World War II, can be attributed to complex historical and political factors. This marginalization occurred in the aftermath of the Chinese Civil War, where the KMT suffered a significant defeat, leading to their retreat to Taiwan. The political divide between the KMT's ideology and the new communist regime in mainland China, along with social and economic changes, resulted in discrimination and persecution of KMT veterans in mainland China. This historical context underscores the importance of documenting their experiences and struggles, as they became a marginalized group within post-World War II China.

the growing accessibility of VR headsets and the proliferation of online VR platforms, I seized the opportunity to construct an immersive virtual exhibition, transcending physical boundaries and offering an engaging digital experience for viewers across the globe.

In January 2022, I organised an exhibition in the wooden house at the Zhijiang Victory Memorial Hall, where the surrender of the Japanese was signed during the Second Sino-Japanese War. The exhibition prominently featured the 26 portraits I had painted, visually representing the resilience and sacrifices of these veterans. This event not only paid tribute to their contributions but also provided a platform for viewers to engage with their stories.

Furthermore, to ensure the preservation and accessibility of the exhibition, I conducted high-definition visual data collection, capturing the essence of the physical exhibition. Using virtual reality technology, I translated the exhibition into an immersive digital experience, accessible to a global audience via the internet²². By employing VR technology, I aimed to transcend physical limitations and provide individuals worldwide with a unique opportunity to engage with the portraits and experience the narratives behind them.

Through strategic utilization of various social media platforms, including YouTube, Douyin, WeChat, and Xiaohongshu, my project engaged viewers and ignited meaningful discussions. These discussions encompassed themes such as recognizing the veterans' stories, exploring the historical and political context of their marginalization, expressing empathy and support, contemplating the societal impact

²² <https://www.chenqi.art/26-vateren> [Accessed 19 August 2023].

of marginalization, and fostering cross-cultural understanding. The project's interdisciplinary approach also prompted dialogues on the innovative use of technology and storytelling in art and historical preservation. These discussions collectively amplified the impact of the project and contributed to widespread awareness of the veterans' experiences and struggles.

The significance of this research lies in its ability to bridge the gap between historical narratives, contemporary art forms, and technological advancements. The video documentaries featured in-depth interviews with the veterans, allowing them to share their personal experiences, challenges, and reflections. These interviews serve as primary source materials, preserving the veterans' narratives in their own words. The documentaries include visual documentation of the veterans' living conditions, their remote regions, and daily life. These visuals provide a historical record and context for future generations to understand the veterans' environments. The painted portraits created as part of the project offer a unique artistic representation of the veterans. These portraits capture the essence of the veterans and serve as visual artifacts that can be appreciated by future generations. The integration of VR technology allows viewers to immerse themselves in the veterans' stories, creating an interactive experience that brings history to life. Future generations can engage with these virtual environments to gain a deeper understanding of the veterans' experiences. By sharing the documentaries on various social media platforms, the project ensures accessibility to a wide audience, including future generations. Online availability guarantees that these narratives are preserved and can be revisited over time. Through this project, I aimed to honour the marginalised communities' contributions, preserve their stories for future generations, and instigate a wider dialogue on the importance of recognising and valuing individuals from all walks of life.

By combining traditional art, documentary filmmaking, and virtual reality, I have created an immersive experience that invites viewers to engage with the portraits and narratives of 26 veterans. Users wear a VR headset, allowing them to explore a 3D world where they can engage with the portraits and narratives of 26 veterans. This interactive experience fosters empathy and emotional engagement and can be accessed globally, contributing to the project's goal of acknowledging and valuing the stories of marginalized individuals. Through the power of social media, this project has garnered significant attention, fostered empathy, and raised awareness on a global scale. By shining a light on the lives of the marginalised, I strive to contribute to societal transformation, fostering a more inclusive world where every individual's story is acknowledged and valued.

Chapter 5 Methodological Approaches and Reflections in Capturing the Stories of Chinese War Veterans

In this chapter, I provide a comprehensive analysis of my creative process and methodological approach in crafting both the portraits and the documentary for capturing the stories of Chinese war veterans. Through the portrait paintings, I primarily employ an on-site plein air technique to emphasise facial characterization, and I incorporate the veterans' own signatures on their portraits. The documentary serves as a reflective exploration of the methodological approaches applied to capture the veterans' narratives. Drawing upon empathetic listening, cultural sensitivity, and reflexivity, I delve into the considerations that shape the interview questions, the approach to listening, and the overall methodological framework. Additionally, I intertwine personal diaries documenting the engagement process with the veterans, providing valuable insights into the challenges, triumphs, and ethical dimensions inherent in documenting the experiences of these veterans.

In the process of creating portraits of Chinese war veterans, my methodological approach relies on a set of deliberate choices aimed at capturing the essence of their experiences and preserving their stories in a meaningful and respectful manner.



Fig 21. Qi Chen. 2021. *Portraits of Twenty-six Veterans*. Chinese ink on silk. 33cm*44cm.

Firstly, I choose to focus on headshot portraits of the veterans while simplifying the depiction of their clothing. This decision is grounded in the belief that their faces serve as powerful representations of their spirit and identity. I am referencing classical and traditional Chinese painting here, as the face was the prominent aspect of the person represented in historical works. As these veterans gradually fade away,

emphasising their faces becomes paramount in conveying their stories, emotions, and the profound impact of their wartime experiences. By simplifying the clothing, I direct the viewers' attention to their faces, enabling a deeper connection with the individual and their journey through history.

Secondly, a crucial aspect of my methodological approach involves including the veterans' own handwriting of their names on the portraits. I request each veteran to inscribe their name on the artwork, establishing a collaborative and personal connection between them and the artwork. This decision represents the idea that their stories are not solely mine to tell; rather, they represent a shared narrative of collective experiences. This artwork attempts to model a state of peace built on the contributions of many, the collaborative inscription in the artwork acknowledges the collective effort and significance of each participant in shaping historical memory.



Fig 22. Qi Chen were drawing the portrait of Mr. Liu Zhaojin. 2021. Chinese ink on silk.
33cm*44cm.

Thirdly, I employ the plein air (on-site) approach for creating the portraits, seeking to immerse myself in the presence of the veterans and involve them in the inscription process. By painting the portraits on-site, I gain an intimate understanding of the veterans' environment and capture the nuances of their presence, developing a deeper relationship and connection through building trust. Inviting the veterans to inscribe their own names on the artwork further personalises the experience, allowing them to feel respected and honoured for their contributions. This approach not only enhances the authenticity of the artwork but also fosters a profound connection and mutual understanding between the veterans and me.

In summary, my methodological approach in portrait painting departs from traditional practices in several ways. The emphasis on headshot portraits and minimal clothing depiction enables a more direct and intimate portrayal of the veterans' identities. The collaborative inscription of the veterans' names on the artwork strengthens the sense of shared narrative and honours their contributions. Lastly, the plein air approach enhances the depth of understanding due to the direct engagement involved in working from life, and creates a powerful connection between the artwork and its subjects. Through these methodological choices, my goal is to create a series of portraits that not only honor the veterans but also offer viewers a profound glimpse into their lives and the sacrifices they made for their country.

During the process of interviewing the veterans, I employed a methodological approach characterised by a combination of empathetic listening and cultural sensitivity. Many of these veterans joined the war efforts during the period of resisting the Japanese invasion under the leadership of Kuomintang (KMT). After the

establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, they remained in their hometowns in Hunan Province for various reasons. However, due to political circumstances, they experienced varying degrees of persecution. Recognizing the significance of their stories and the sensitivity of the subject matter, I approach each interview with respect, attentiveness, and a commitment to fostering a safe and trusting environment for the veterans to share their experiences.

For instance, prior to interviewing Mr. Wu Hewen, a volunteer informed me that he was recently discovered as a veteran. Specifically, he participated in a guerrilla unit during the war, but because he was too young at the time, he did not officially enlist. After the victory of the war, he witnessed the persecution suffered of Nationalist soldiers, and as a result, he was reluctant to acknowledge his own identity, fearing it would harm his children. Thus, he worked in other places to avoid revealing his wartime experiences. Understanding that certain topics could make him uncomfortable during the interview, I consciously avoided such questions and instead allowed him to recall and share information at his own pace.

Several key considerations shape the questions asked during the interviews. Firstly, I aimed to strike a balance between open-ended questions, which encouraged veterans to freely express themselves, and targeted questions that focused on specific aspects of their experiences. This approach facilitates a comprehensive exploration of their narratives while ensuring that critical themes and insights are captured²³. A

²³ In the interviews with veterans, the methodological approach aimed to strike a balance between open-ended and targeted questions to ensure a comprehensive exploration of their narratives while capturing critical themes and insights. This approach aligns with principles of Participant Observation Interviewing, which is grounded in ethnographic theories and approaches. Participant Observation Interviewing involves engaging with research participants in a manner that respects their experiences and cultural contexts. To ensure ethical considerations were met, I drew upon the principles and guidelines associated with Participant Observation Interviewing (source: <https://research.utoronto.ca/participant-observation>) to navigate the research process with cultural sensitivity and respect for the veterans' perspectives and experiences. For further information on Participant Observation Interviewing, refer to the Wikipedia page on Participant Observation

well-known participant observer Spradley, notes that we should consider what people do (cultural behavior), what people know (cultural knowledge), and what people make and use (cultural artifacts) (Spradley, 2016). In my interviews, I am not only recording their verbal expressions, but also their behavior and living environment.

For instance, before interviewing Mr. Liu Weizhong, I had gained a general understanding of his experiences. He was forcefully conscripted into the anti-Japanese forces under the Nationalist government's "recruitment of able-bodied men." He miraculously survived during several battles and even experienced periods of desertion. Later, he joined the Communist Party. His life journey demonstrates that his fate was not entirely determined by subjective choices; during the turbulent times of war, he had very limited agency and could only go with the flow of constantly unfolding events. Therefore, during the interview, I completely avoided probing questions related to partisan choices and instead adopted the role of an attentive listener, allowing him to narrate his life story at his own pace.

Cultural sensitivity plays a crucial role in formulating questions during the interviews. Recognizing the veterans' diverse backgrounds and regional variations, I consider their unique perspectives shaped by their cultural, historical, and regional contexts. This allows for a more nuanced understanding of their experiences and the impact of their individual backgrounds on their wartime experiences.

For instance, during the interview with Mr. Qin Yupei, I learned that he was not originally from Hunan; he and his brother came from the mountainous region of

(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Participant_observation). This approach enhances the depth and quality of the interviews while prioritizing ethical research practices when working with this community.

Sichuan. The primary reason for joining the army was for survival, as enlisting provided regular access to food. He and his brother joined different units to avoid the risk of both of them losing their lives in the same war. After the victory of the Second Sino-Japanese War, they chose to stay in the local area where living conditions were better. Through this interview, viewers gain insight into the various motivations behind people's decision to join the military during that time.

Listening plays a central role in the interviews, involving not only hearing the veterans' words but also paying attention to their emotions, non-verbal cues, and the subtleties of their storytelling. Actively engaging with their narratives, I aim to create a space where the veterans feel heard and validated, enabling them to share their experiences more fully.

For example, during the interview with Mr. Wu Ruchuan, he lived in a remote mountainous area, and our visit disrupted his otherwise peaceful life. Additionally, it had been quite some time since he last saw any volunteers, which led to some complaints about the infrequent visits. At the beginning, he was reluctant to face the camera and was unwilling to be painted. He mentioned that a painter had come many years ago and made him look ugly in the painting. Therefore, if I were to paint him, I should capture his most handsome appearance, not his current aged appearance. Throughout this process, I discovered that he was actually quite talkative. Thus, rather than posing many questions to him, I simply played the role of a silent listener. He gradually transitioned from complaints to joking with me and finally faced the camera willingly, allowing me to proceed with the photography.

Throughout the interview process, I recognized the influence of my own biases,

assumptions, and cultural perspectives. Engaging in reflexivity, I critically reflected on the dynamics at play during the interviews and considered how my position may have influenced the interactions. By acknowledging and addressing these factors, I aimed to minimise any potential impact on the veterans' narratives and ensure the integrity of the data collected.

For instance, when interviewing Mr. Li Kunyuan, I realised that he was a soldier with a strong sense of responsibility toward his nation and people. Throughout his life, he constantly pondered how to contribute to the prosperity of his country. After hearing his experiences, I asked him, "Do you have any message for the younger generation?" He replied, "The younger generation should strive to make the country prosperous; this is the right path." Though his words were brief, it captured his lifelong aspiration.

This methodological approach, rooted in empathetic listening, cultural sensitivity, and reflexivity, forms the foundation for the interviews conducted with Chinese war veterans. By considering the unique backgrounds of the veterans, framing thoughtful questions, and actively engaging with their narratives, I aim to create a space that honours their experiences and enables a comprehensive exploration of their stories. Through this approach, I endeavored to capture the richness and complexity of their wartime experiences and contribute to a deeper understanding of their contributions and sacrifices.

Meiqin Wang, a professor at California State University, has provided a broader theoretical framework for understanding the significance of the project within the context of contemporary art practices in her work *Socially Engaged Art in Contemporary China*. Through her exploration of various artists and their projects,

Wang highlights how they not only advocate for new social causes but also create alternative spaces for the production and dissemination of knowledge and theory regarding the possibilities of art. In doing so, they emphasize the practical, transformative, and activating power of art for social criticism, place construction, and human development, thereby asserting the right to instigate bottom-up social change. In the contemporary globalized context of China, such perspectives hold significant practical relevance (Wang, 2019). The outcomes of my project have similarly played a positive role in society, drawing increased attention to these veterans and their historical experiences. By engaging with Meiqin Wang's insights and aligning with the aims of socially engaged art, my project has contributed to fostering greater awareness and understanding of these veterans and their significant place in history.

In *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, British art historian, critic, and Professor of Art History at CUNY Graduate Center Claire Bishop (2012) offers profound insights into the intersection of art and society, particularly regarding participatory art forms. Bishop argues that participatory art has the potential to catalyze social change by actively engaging audiences and blurring the boundaries between art and everyday life. She contends that such art practices create spaces for dialogue, critique, and collective action, challenging traditional power structures and fostering a more inclusive and democratic society. Bishop's perspective underscores the transformative power of art in shaping social consciousness and advocating for progressive ideals. As she aptly states, "Participatory art offers a potent critique of passive spectatorship and consumer culture, advocating instead for active participation and social engagement as integral components of artistic practice." (Bishop, 2012) This assertion highlights the profound impact that art can have on society by encouraging active involvement and redefining the relationship between

artists, audiences, and the broader community.

In conclusion, through this creative exploration, I aimed to present a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of their contributions and sacrifices during a tumultuous period in history. As these veterans are gradually fading from our midst, their faces and spirits are vividly portrayed in the headshot portraits, encapsulating the essence of their experiences. The inclusion of their signatures on the artwork further reinforces the notion of shared authorship and collaboration, signifying the collective effort in preserving their memories. Moreover, engaging in the process of on-site sketching for the portraits has allowed for a profound connection with the veterans, capturing their essence and inviting them to participate in the artistic expression, symbolising the sincerity and respect with which their stories are presented.

Furthermore, the documentary component of the project provides a reflective exploration of the methodological approaches employed in capturing the veterans' stories. By intertwining personal diaries that chronicle the engagement with the veterans, this chapter offers valuable insights into the challenges, triumphs, and ethical dimensions inherent in documenting their experiences.

The empathetic listening, cultural sensitivity, and reflexivity employed during the interviews have not only enriched the narratives but have also provided a deeper understanding of the veterans' unique perspectives shaped by their cultural, historical, and regional contexts.

With this project, my intention is not only to reclaim the status of these Chinese war veterans but also to inspire a broader societal shift in how marginalised individuals

are perceived and valued. By fostering empathy, understanding, and appreciation, this practice based PhD project aims to bridge cultural divides and promote a more inclusive and compassionate world. As we continue to share and disseminate these stories, it is my sincere hope that this project will serve as a powerful reminder of the resilience and sacrifices of these individuals and contribute to a more harmonious and compassionate global community.

Chapter 6 Challenges and Difficulties Encountered and Proposed Solutions and Artistic Decision-making

Since World War II, advances in science and information technology have fostered development in many fields, and in the field of art, more creative possibilities have been opened, with purely pictorial expressions becoming the so-called tradition among many forms. With a long history, Chinese portrait painting has been carrying the function of transmitting the spirit, documenting and describing the lives of individuals down the centuries. It is a record of historical images, which makes portraiture a visual art archive that accompanies the history of Chinese civilisation. They also maintained the power relations between people and upheld the status quo. I have used this traditional style of portrait painting to show the faces of a group of individuals who were not members of an elevated powerful elite or leaders in war, but marginalised soldiers, hoping to create a landmark image of them on the stage of history.

The veterans have all had different experiences of war, and the 26 portraits present the faces of these resilient lives. Their difficult experiences have also cast every wrinkle, eye, and expression on their faces. The in-depth capture of these details also continues to motivate me to complete each part of the work. To complete the portrayal of life and soul by understanding the stories behind the individuals is a ritualistic form of shaping that I want to express in my graphic portraits. The portraits are painted on silk using traditional Chinese portrait painting techniques, personally inscribed by the veterans themselves and framed in the form of a scroll (Figure 21).

The portraits presented here are a framed representation of the object on a two-dimensional plane, not just a physical reproduction of the object's appearance captured at a certain point in time, but a grasp of the subject's life, after learning about his life and developing a relationship with him. This presentation, combined with the way I chose to mount them on the vertical axis, functions as both a reproduction of the subject's temperament and an expression of my subjective emotions, providing the viewer with a sense of gravity and reverence for this period of history.

Portraiture is a static art form, which evokes the viewer's reverie for information beyond the picture through a two-dimensional still image. However, a flat presentation of portraits alone does not give the viewer a fuller understanding of the stories of these veterans, so I had to try to expand the boundaries of the art form by integrating portraiture with documentary film. A documentary is a dynamic art form, which presents viewers with a constantly changing situation in time through ever changing images and sound (Figure 23). The use of documentary film making proved appropriate in representing the process involved in creating this project, which involved travelling to visit the veterans in their remote locations. The act of filming these journeys and encounters recorded both my creative process and described the authentic lives, families and individuality of these veterans. I was able to record the actual words, expressions and personal stories of the men using video. The medium of painting or drawing alone cannot include this wealth of information and in my opinion this is precisely the kind of information that the viewer wants to know and experience when viewing a portrait.. The still portraits and the documentary footage are partners in such a moment, and together they present the full picture o spirit and life of these veterans.

Some of the brave men and women who lived through the Second World War are still alive, and in a land that was once littered with corpses, there is no longer a battle between the dead and the living. This is what I convey through the documentary film.



Fig 23. Qi Chen. 2022. *Documentary of Twenty-six Veterans*.

The Covid pandemic occurred during the creation of this project and it became an important that this work receive wide public attention due to the restrictions places on physical exhibition space such as galleries and museums. So, I considered how the entire project could be made more accessible and publicly available, to both a local and a global audience.

In terms of public viewership, I did not want my audience to be only from a specific region. In terms of presentation, the project consisted of traditional portraits and

documentaries which could be translated into virtual still images and moving image.

In terms of subject matter, the work explored universal themes - World War II, post-war society and the representation of a marginalised group. So I considered all the possibilities available to make this project both locally and globally available.

Most professional gallery spaces can hang paintings and show short films on various media and electronic devices, but this is not the 'only' way to present them. So, I asked the question backwards: where is the appropriate and meaningful location where these works 'should' or 'must' appear, rather than where do they 'can' appear? So "where should the portraits and documentaries of these 26 veterans from the Huaihua region of Hunan appear most? I decided the most important place to show the work was in the place where the veterans themselves are located.

They were born in the Huaihua region of Hunan, defended it to the death in their youth, and saw it at peace in the twilight of their lives. They witnessed the brutal warfare that World War II brought to this land, and they also witnessed the hard-won peace here. In this region exists the wooden palace where the Japanese signed the surrender letter is in the Huaihua Zhijiang area, where the last Japanese invasion of China took place, and has been preserved intact to this day. This building is now known as the Chinese People's War of Resistance against Japan Victory Surrender Memorial Hall. Historically speaking, the Chinese victory over the Japanese in this war was made possible by the sacrifice of young lives, and the subsequent peace would not have been achievable without their tragic sacrifices. I felt it was important to acknowledge this truth and reflect it in the work, in its location and its presentation.

Regarding the exhibition space, there are two displayable wooden walls and nine

separate spaces between the windows, each accommodating three paintings. This arrangement allows for a total of 26 works, with one empty space intentionally left which I filled with a blank piece of silk paper. The layout may appear coincidental, but geographically speaking, it mirrors the indomitable spirit of the veterans in the Huaihua area, the focus of my depiction. Their unwavering determination contributed to the Japanese army's difficulties and ultimate surrender. It is through the bravery and sacrifice of these local veterans that their communities found strength and resilience.



Fig 24. Qi Chen and Mr. Liu Daomin in the exhibition. 2022.

I also decided to create a virtual reality space to present this project to a wider global audience on the world wide web that represented the full scope of the project. Before I could build the virtual reality space, I needed to first build the exhibition in the real world. On 8 January 2022, I received the full support and cooperation of the Second

Sino-Japanese War Victory Surrender Memorial Hall and successfully completed the exhibition²⁴. There are still five war veterans alive in the Zhijiang area, two of whom are still able to walk. I invited two veterans specifically in the hope that they would be able to come into this space. One of the veterans, Mr Liu Daomin, was unable to travel due to the cold weather, and the other, Mr Wu Tinghai, accompanied by his family, came to the exhibition hall, and he became the only guest of the exhibition.

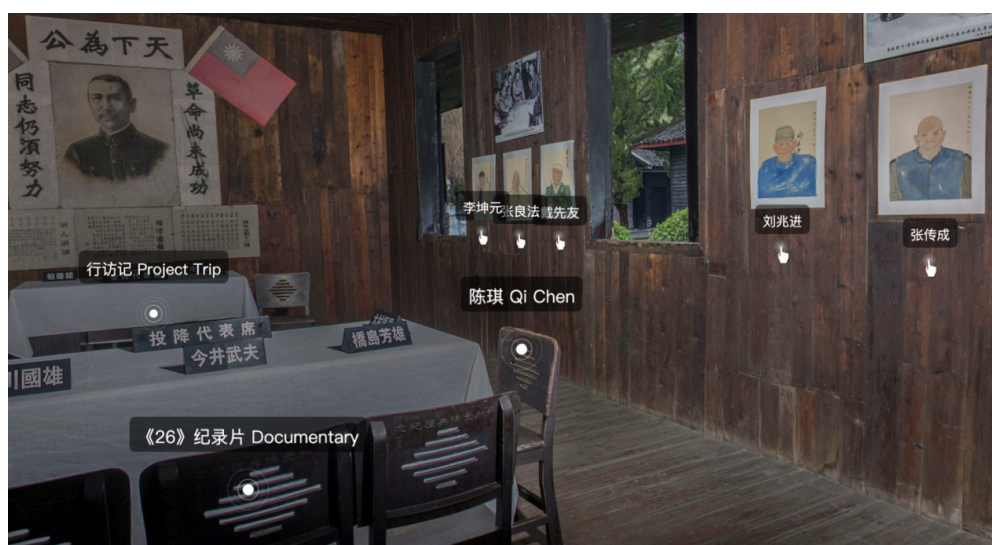


Fig 25. Qi Chen. 2022. *VR of Twenty-six Veterans*.

During my research process, I also encountered several challenges that shaped my understanding of the project and highlighted the complexities inherent in working with a diverse range of media. One of the prominent issues was the technical aspect of incorporating virtual reality (VR) into the artworks (Figure 25). While VR offers an immersive and interactive experience, it requires extensive technical expertise and equipment, posing logistical and financial constraints. Navigating the intricacies of

²⁴ To gain permission for the project, I had the opportunity to present my plans to the director of the Second Sino-Japanese War Victory Surrender Memorial Hall in Zhijiang, Hunan. This meeting took place with the introduction and assistance of the production team from Hunan Satellite TV. The director was deeply moved by my project proposal and, upon hearing the details of the plan, made the generous decision to grant me access to the venue to complete the exhibition. This collaboration was instrumental in bringing the project to fruition, and I am grateful for the support and cooperation of the Second Sino-Japanese War Victory Surrender Memorial Hall.

VR technology, such as creating seamless transitions and ensuring compatibility across platforms, demanded continuous learning and problem-solving.

Another challenge stemmed from the delicate balance between preserving the authenticity of the veterans' stories and navigating the censorship regulations imposed by the publishing process. In the context of China, censorship refers to the control and restriction of information and content by government authorities. This challenge compelled me to find creative ways to maintain the integrity of the project's central ideas within the confines of the regulatory framework.

Despite these challenges, working with a diverse range of media also brought notable strengths to the project. The incorporation of portraiture, documentary film, and VR allowed for a multi-dimensional and immersive exploration of the veterans' experiences. Each medium offered a unique perspective and contributed to a comprehensive and multi-layered portrayal of the individuals and their narratives. Portraiture captured the essence of their physical presence, documentary film provided a visual narrative in time, context and motion, and VR technology enabled viewers to engage with their stories in a more immersive and interactive manner.

In the process of developing my VR project, I am confronted with the challenges posed by the rapid pace of technological advancement. Particularly notable is the frequent updating of VR headsets and applications, necessitating continuous refinement and debugging of the project to remain aligned with the swiftly evolving technological landscape. Concurrently, I must remain vigilant regarding issues such as path dependency, built-in obsolescence, and discontinuous innovation, as these factors can significantly influence the trajectory and sustainability of the project. Hence,

maintaining a high degree of flexibility and adaptability is imperative in effectively addressing these challenges, thereby ensuring the successful execution of the project.

Although these emerging technological means facilitate broader dissemination, they also entail inherent limitations. Jan van Dijk (2020), a prominent scholar in the field of communication studies from the Netherlands, has extensively researched the digital society and digitisation, introducing the concept of the "Digital Divide." This phenomenon refers to the unequal distribution of access and utilisation of information and communication technologies (ICT) within digitised societies. Such disparities may stem from various factors including economic, educational, geographical, and cultural aspects. The Digital Divide underscores the disparities wherein certain demographics or regions possess advanced technology and extensive network resources, while others face inequalities in accessing technology and information. It is noteworthy that virtual reality (VR) technology remains largely unattained in many regions, although its accessibility is expected to increase in the future alongside technological advancements and dissemination.

Furthermore, while social media serves as a platform enabling audience engagement with content, it also harbours vulnerabilities. Christian Fuchs (2007), a scholar renowned for his extensive investigations into the adverse impacts of social media usage, delves into its implications on privacy, surveillance, and digital inequality. Through his research, a deeper understanding of the potential risks and negative ramifications associated with social media usage can be gained.

In 2023, in addition to the online exhibition on social media, my project has been selected as a key supported project by the Hunan Provincial Academy of Fine Arts.

As a result, a dedicated art book will be published to showcase the project. It is important to note that the publication process in mainland China involves a strict review system where sensitive ideological terms are scrutinised and potentially removed. However, despite these limitations, the essence of my project's ideas and concepts remains intact. The book also helps the widespread accessibility and dissemination of the project to local and national audiences in China. The art book is scheduled to be printed by the end of 2023, serving as a tangible testament to the preservation of my artistic endeavour.

The significance of this development lies in the social value it brings to my art project. By being chosen as a key supported project and having a dedicated art book, my work gains recognition and validation from the Hunan Provincial Academy of Fine Arts, an esteemed institution in the field. This recognition elevates the visibility and reach of my project, allowing it to have a broader impact on society.

The publication of the art book not only ensures the preservation of my project in a physical form but also serves to disseminate the stories and experiences of the war veterans to a wider audience. Despite the potential limitations imposed by the review process, the core ideas and narratives that underline the project's social and historical importance are retained. By documenting the portraits, film footage, and virtual reality representation in a printed medium, the art book provides a tangible and lasting record of the veterans' stories, ensuring their legacy and the significance of their experiences are not forgotten.

Furthermore, the publication of the art book signifies a bridge between art, society, and history, as it combines visual art forms with social and historical narratives. It

allows for a multi-dimensional exploration of the veterans' lives, their contributions during the war, and the lasting impact of their experiences. This interdisciplinary approach fosters a deeper understanding of the human side of history and the complexities of war.

In a broader context, the art book's publication symbolises the resilience of art in navigating and expressing narratives within the constraints of a complex sociopolitical environment. Despite the necessary adjustments made to comply with the censorship guidelines, the project's core ideas and the veterans' stories are preserved, ensuring their representation and recognition.

Ultimately, the social value and significance of my art project, exemplified by the selection as a key supported project and the publication of the art book, lie in its ability to raise awareness, provoke empathy, and contribute to the collective memory of the war veterans' experiences. It serves as a testament to their sacrifices, resilience, and the ongoing relevance of their stories in contemporary society.

In conclusion, the integration of a wide range of media in my project presented both strengths and challenges. While the diverse representational formats and media allowed for a nuanced exploration of the veterans' stories and enhanced audience engagement, it also posed technical, social and logistical difficulties. Balancing the preservation of authenticity with the requirements of censorship regulations further added complexity to the research process. Nonetheless, by overcoming these challenges and leveraging the strengths of different media forms, my project achieved a more comprehensive and impactful representation of the veterans' experiences, fostering empathy, understanding, and appreciation for their contributions.

Chapter 7 Project dissemination and Social Impact

In terms of the subjects of portraiture, although many works of art about the Second World War were created after the war, very few attempted to document the ordinary soldiers who participated in the Chinese Japanese War between the years 1937 and 1945. Specifically, there is an almost complete absence of portraits of these subjects. By following these soldiers during the last few months or years of their lives, I have contributed to bridging a gap in the artistic recording and representation of this group.

I painted the portraits very thin and light silk using techniques that are customary in Chinese portrait painting. Most traditional Chinese portraits show reverence for ancestors or imperial power; nevertheless, depictions of minor figures or common people receive very little attention. In contrast, I took a highly ritualistic and classical approach when drawing the portraits of these World War II soldiers who fought for their country during the conflict. This represents a unique approach to ‘ordinary’ subjects, especially as they have been also socially marginalised. I have produced work which presents a new direction for the genre of traditional Chinese portrait making.

There are many documentaries all over the world that focus on the overall narrative of World War II; however, there are not many works that concentrate on the individuals who experienced the war. This may be because of geographical and linguistic limitations on access to the subjects who could be interviewed, especially in China. Moreover, because of the delicate nature of the political subject matter in certain regions of mainland China, interviews with Chinese anti-Japanese combat veterans

are rarely conducted in significant depth in the context of documentaries. This gap in documentary footage is filled by my documentation of the final months or years of these veterans' lives.

The implementation of recently developed virtual reality (VR) technology has led to groundbreaking innovations across a wide range of business, communications and cultural sectors and has led to new approaches to the presentation of art. These recent developments have provided me a new and innovative way to display my work. Presenting my project on the world wide web frees it from restrictions to a fixed traditional gallery or art museum display space, restrictions which became very obvious during the Covid pandemic. These new modes of presentation and display have allowed my work to occupy a field that is most suited to it, while utilising VR to give more viewers an immersive experience. This has allowed me to expand the audience for whom I can display my work. In terms of display methods, this opens a brand-new avenue for research and development.

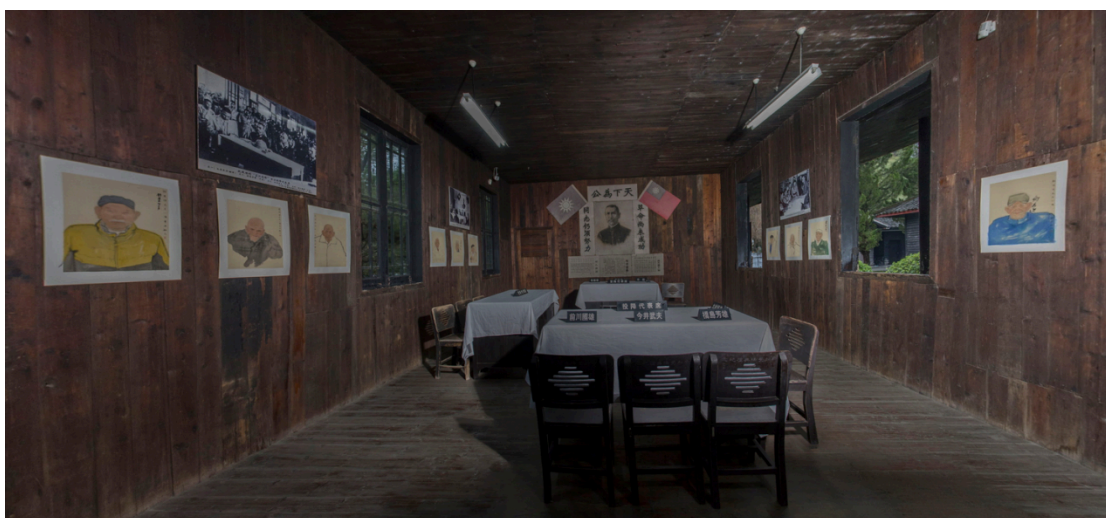


Fig 26. Qi Chen. 2022. *Portrait, Video, and VR /Twenty-six Veterans.*

<https://www.chenqi.art/26-vateren>

My ability to present my project in a comprehensive and multi-faceted manner has been made possible by this combination of explorations into new areas of communications technology. This has allowed me to transition from presenting my project as a two-dimensional still image to presenting it as a flowing documentary narrative to presenting it as a virtual reality experience in the third dimension. This artistic presentation that spans dimensions is not restricted to the confines of any venue and can be shared in a manner that is independent of dimensions, forms of expression, and geographical locations. In terms of dimensions as well as the visual and audio impression, this is an approach that can develop cross-dimensional expressive and geographical art projects that recover the status of marginalised communities (Figure 26).

After the exhibition, sharing my project on social media platforms such as TikTok and YouTube also serves multiple purposes and carries significant meaning. Firstly, these platforms provide a vast and diverse audience reach, allowing me to connect with a global community and share the stories and experiences of marginalised veterans on a larger scale. The substantial following, I have collected on Douyin, with 38,000 followers in just one year, demonstrates the interest and engagement people have in the project.



As shown in the two figures above, as of May 2023, this documentary project has collected a total of 1.05 million views. The video featuring veteran Shu Qingyu for example received 122 comments, 5724 likes, and 215,000 views. Many people have been deeply moved by watching these videos and have left messages expressing their blessings to the veterans and paying tribute to them.

By utilising social media, I can overcome geographical and cultural barriers, reaching individuals who may not have physical access to venue based art exhibitions or documentary screenings. This democratisation of access allows for a wider dissemination of the project's message and fosters a sense of inclusivity. Through these platforms, I can bridge the gap between different generations, cultures, and backgrounds, encouraging dialogue and promoting a deeper understanding of the

experiences of these veterans.

Moreover, social media platforms offer interactive features that enable viewers to engage directly with the content. The high viewership of over 100,000 on Douyin for the veterans' documentary and the numerous comments reflect the emotional impact and resonance the project has had on audiences. This interactivity facilitates meaningful conversations, encourages empathy, and raises awareness about the historical significance of the veterans' experiences and the importance of preserving their stories.

Additionally, social media platforms allow for the rapid and viral spread of content, leading to increased visibility and potential for the project to go viral. This heightened exposure can attract attention from various stakeholders, including media outlets, cultural institutions, and organisations working in the field of veterans' rights and historical preservation. It can also inspire others to undertake similar initiatives, fostering a broader movement of acknowledging and honouring the contributions of marginalised individuals and groups.

On YouTube, I received this message which made me feel that my project did resonate with more people. One viewer, Fredgard, left the following message:

“This part of history is not forgotten, it is unknown. Most people in Europe and in my country Poland, know nothing about this war that preceded World War II. China is mentioned in a few sentences in school history books in the context of war between Japan and USA. For us, the aggressors were the German and Russians (soviets), Japanese (although we were at war), our Intelligence

services worked together against common enemy Soviets. History is weird. There is a large cultural gap between Poland (Europe) and China, but we should learn from each other. While in Beijing, I saw many people in BOY T-shirts with the eagle of the Germans murdering millions in death factories (e.g., Auschwitz) and during the occupation. On the other hand, in our culture symbol of rising sun is not associated with the horrors of war and war crimes but with brave and honour, we also have it on our shirts. We should be aware of this. We can learn a lot about how nationalist and communist fight together to oppose aggression of foreign power. This is a great inspiration. The heroic warriors, defender of China deserves a commemoration such as this film and paintings. Although I know and an interested in history, thank you that I could learn about these people.”

In addition to collecting feedback and social impact on social media platforms, my project is also being included and reported by official media outlets. In June 2023, my project received recognition from Hunan TV International, a prominent television channel in China. The journey of interviewing veterans and creating this exhibition project culminated in a broadcast on Hunan TV International during the golden time slot of the Dragon Boat Festival. This holds significant meaning for me and for all the individuals involved in the project including their families, as many veterans have passed away over the course of this year. The Dragon Boat Festival is not only a celebration of the patriotic poet Qu Yuan but also a day of remembrance for Chinese fallen heroes. The airing of this program allows a wider audience to witness the significance of this undertaking.

Hunan TV International holds substantial influence and reaches a diverse audience

both domestically and internationally. As one of the leading television networks in China, it gains recognition for its high-quality programming and extensive coverage of various genres, including news, entertainment, and documentaries. With a wide viewership base, including both Chinese and international audiences, the broadcast on Hunan TV International provides a platform to raise awareness and foster a deeper understanding of the sacrifices made by veterans. It serves as a powerful medium to engage viewers, provoke thought, and inspire a sense of gratitude and respect for our national heroes.

I also received an invitation to produce a documentary for Hunan TV, which wants to follow me to Ireland and Venice, Italy, to film my exhibition and to explore the theme of 'Art for Peace.' We will visit Spain to see the paintings of Picasso and Goya, and Germany to observe the artworks of Kathe and Kiefer, artists who I have researched and whose work influenced this project. Additionally, we plan to visit the Memorial to the Holocaust. The documentary aims to prepare for the 80th anniversary of the victory in the Second Sino-Japanese War 1937-1945 in 2025.

However, scholars like Christian Fuchs (2007) have outlined broader concerns surrounding the use of social media, particularly concerning privacy, algorithmic bias, and the commodification of user data. These issues intersect with the democratization of access facilitated by social media in the context of my project, prompting questions about the ethical implications of relying on these platforms for dissemination.

One vulnerability lies in the potential for algorithmic bias to influence the visibility and reach of content, potentially reinforcing existing inequalities or biases. Social media algorithms often prioritise content based on factors such as engagement metrics

and user behaviour, which may inadvertently amplify certain voices while marginalising others. Additionally, the commodification of user data raises privacy concerns, as personal information collected by social media platforms can be exploited for targeted advertising or other purposes without users' consent.

Moreover, the viral nature of social media can also pose risks, as misinformation or misinterpretation of content can spread rapidly, potentially distorting the intended message of the project. In the context of discussing veterans' experiences, this vulnerability underscores the importance of ensuring accurate and respectful portrayal, as sensitive topics may be easily misconstrued or sensationalised in the fast-paced environment of social media.

Despite these vulnerabilities, social media remains a powerful tool for fostering dialogue, raising awareness, and mobilising support for important causes like preserving veterans' stories. However, it's essential to approach its use critically and ethically, considering the broader implications for privacy, representation, and social justice. By navigating these challenges thoughtfully, my project can harness the potential of social media while mitigating its vulnerabilities, ultimately contributing to a more informed and inclusive public discourse surrounding veterans' experiences.

In terms of publication, as mentioned in the previous chapter, I am currently finding ways to work around and circumventing various restrictions on publishing reviews. Consequently, I am now able to legally print and publish an extensive volume of nearly 200 pages within mainland China. This achievement allows for the preservation of the veterans' stories in a tangible format, ensuring their narratives are safeguarded for future generations. By overcoming the challenges posed by

publication censorship, the project serves as a testament to the resilience and determination to preserve the historical experiences of these veterans. The publication not only documents their stories but also symbolises the triumph of free expression and the importance of remembering and honouring the sacrifices made by these marginalised veterans. Additionally, the inclusion and coverage of my project by official media channels further enhances its significance and reach.

In summary, sharing my project on social media platforms serves the purpose of reaching a wider audience, breaking down barriers, fostering inclusivity, promoting dialogue, and raising awareness. The engagement and feedback received from the online community validate the project's significance and highlight the power of social media as a tool for amplifying marginalised voices and promoting social change.

Conclusion

This research is essential because it will provide future generations with the opportunity to learn about the experiences of these individuals who have been excluded from popular narratives about World War II. This group has been left out of the mainstream stories and representations that have been told about the war. My project will allow people from around the world access to information about these veterans and the context of their struggles, their contribution to history and their lives through the world wide web and VR technology which has not previously been available. It is important to provide a deeper understanding of the experiences of the Chinese veterans during World War II because they have often been ignored or misrepresented in historical accounts.

In the specific context of my project, using documentary film making has allowed for a deeper understanding of the lives of the veterans over the past century. The video recordings of their unique experiences and perspectives provides valuable insights into how they relate, or perhaps struggle to relate, to the advancements in technology and new media. Video allows us to engage with the dimension of time in which we can examining their interactions with these transformative developments.

Furthermore, working with the concept of space emerges as a critical aspect of the project, particularly when considering virtual, 3D, and exhibition spaces, as well as online platforms like TikTok and YouTube. Each of these spaces operates in distinct ways, shaping the viewing experience and influencing the reception of the artworks. Virtual and 3D spaces offer immersive and interactive encounters, blurring the

boundaries between physical and digital realms. They are new spaces in which human beings can create, operate and interact. Additionally, online platforms provide an expansive reach, enabling the artworks to be accessed by a global and diverse audience.

Analysing how these different spaces function and their effects on the perception and engagement with the artworks adds depth to the exploration of the evolving dynamics between art, technology, and audience participation. It underscores the significance of transcending physical limitations and embracing innovative ways of connecting with viewers. Through this multidimensional examination of time and space, my project acquires a broader societal value, reflecting the intricate interplay between historical narratives, technological advancements, and the evolving relationship between art and its audiences.

My initial goal was to tell a story about Chinese veterans. The development of the research, the inspiration of the artists I referenced and the new ideas I realised for presentation methods allowed me to explore the lives of these individuals in more depth and give them an opportunity to speak for themselves. The project has created a platform for a marginalised group of individuals to share their stories and be seen as human beings with their own identity. In this way, my work promotes a more inclusive society where everyone has an equal chance at being seen and heard. My main goal is to help people understand what it is like to be a person within this community through their own eyes. I want to show through portraiture, installation, and VR that it is possible for these people who have been disregarded to have agency and create their own stories without relying on others for permission or validation.

War, an armed struggle for political and economic objectives, has been a recurring social phenomenon throughout human history. The Second World War, the most extensive and deadliest conflict, continues to reverberate globally. Conflicts and tensions persist in various regions, perpetuating political rivalries and highlighting the importance of preventing the recurrence of such tragedies. This research project emphasises the indelible impact of war on individual lives and aims to serve as a reminder to future generations of the need for peace and understanding.

In summary, this research project centres around documenting the stories and capturing the essence of a particular group of Second World War veterans. Through ink portraits, documentaries, and virtual reality representations, the project strives to provide a profound exploration of the experiences, sacrifices, and resilience of these individuals. By shedding light on the human cost of war, the project serves as a poignant reminder of the importance of peace, understanding, and empathy in a world still grappling with conflicts and tensions. It is a heartfelt tribute to those who lived through the war and a call to future generations to learn from the past and strive for a better, more peaceful world.

My Contribution to Knowledge and Understanding

In this project, my intention is to reclaim the status of a specific group of marginalised Chinese veterans by combining expanded portraiture, documentary filmmaking, and virtual reality (VR) technology on the world wide web.²⁵ Through this innovative synthesis of media, I have shown how to a more profound form of representation can be created to offer insight into the experiences of marginalised groups within society. This creative exploration finds ways to connect together traditional Chinese painting techniques, documentary storytelling, and immersive VR platforms, offering viewers a distinctive and profound experience that virtually transports them across the world to encounter the perspectives of this marginalised community. By doing so, I foster empathy and understanding for a group who have been overlooked in Chinese society.

One of my primary contributions to new knowledge is the integration of traditional Chinese portraiture with a contemporary art form: virtual reality. This innovative approach allows me to juxtapose the best of tradition with the current technological innovation to incorporate real-life and three dimensional elements into the storytelling process, providing a deeper understanding of each subject's identity, background and experiences. The use of VR technology brings additional layers of context to the narratives, shedding light on the veterans' struggles, powerlessness, the impact of the war, and the loss of their colleagues. By immersing the audience in the historical and cultural contexts, VR enriches the storytelling experience and enables a more comprehensive appreciation of the veterans' stories. As a result of my multi art form approach to representing the veterans, and using the enveloping medium of VR, ethical dimensions of this representational project are central as viewers are enabled

²⁵ <https://www.chenqi.art/26-vateren> [Accessed July 1, 2023].

to confront the veterans' stories and reflect upon their own moral responsibilities towards those who have experienced the consequences of war. I have also evidenced an ethics of engagement with the veterans in this project through the direct approach of oral history recording and non directive interviewing techniques.

Throughout my research, I recognised that the media (mass communication forms of broadcasting, publishing and social media) often portray marginalised groups in a negative light worldwide. I have countered this by combining expanded portraiture with documentary filmmaking and VR technology, and in so doing I have demonstrated the potential for creating more positive and empathetic portrayals of Chinese veterans. The multi-faceted storytelling approach showcased in this project can contribute to changing societal perceptions of marginalised individuals. Through artistic digital content, we foster cross-cultural understanding and empathy, ultimately promoting understanding, peace and harmony among diverse communities.

Moreover, my intention in the project is to encourage more artists, filmmakers, and researchers to adopt expanded portraiture and documentary techniques in interconnected ways to represent and convey the stories of marginalised or forgotten individuals or communities in compelling and innovative ways. I have shown how VR technology enhances our understanding of the veterans' experiences and their significance in historical events, adding context and depth to their narratives.

In conclusion, I have also shown how a contemporary translation of traditional Chinese portraiture can more fully represent the subtleties of life and soul by understanding the stories behind the individuals. I have approached this as a ritualistic form of shaping. The VR component, in particular, adds contextual richness to their

experiences, providing a backdrop that deepens our understanding of their struggles, sacrifices, and the impact of historical events on their lives. Through this project, I foster empathy, bridge cultural divides, and contribute to a more inclusive and harmonious world. The stories of these particular veterans, presented through a novel combination of artistic and technological mediums, serve as a powerful testament to the resilience, humanity and important contributions of marginalised communities.

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Interviewees Release Forms

My position statement:

In the interviews with veterans, the methodological approach aimed to strike a balance between open-ended and targeted questions to ensure a comprehensive exploration of their narratives while capturing critical themes and insights. This approach aligns with principles of Participant Observation Interviewing, which is grounded in ethnographic theories and approaches. Participant Observation Interviewing involves engaging with research participants in a manner that respects their experiences and cultural contexts. To ensure ethical considerations were met, I drew upon the principles and guidelines associated with Participant Observation Interviewing²⁶ to navigate the research process with cultural sensitivity and respect for the veterans' perspectives and experiences. For further information on Participant Observation Interviewing, refer to the Wikipedia page on Participant Observation²⁷. This approach enhances the depth and quality of the interviews while prioritising ethical research practices when working with this community.

²⁶ <https://research.utoronto.ca/participant-observation> [Accessed 19 August 2023].

²⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Participant_observation [Accessed 19 August 2023].

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Producer 制片人:

Qi Chen 陈琪

Title of Programme/Series 项目名称:

Reclaiming the status of marginalised groups-- combining expanded portraiture, documentary, and VR 通过肖像画、纪录片和虚拟现实技术重视边缘化群体

Name of Interviewee 被采访人:

Zhang Chuancheng 龙潭张传成

Address and contact telephone number of Interviewee 被采访人联络方式:

The 26 veterans live in different parts of the Xiangxi region of Hunan Province, China, and can usually only be contacted through Mr. Zhang Zhonghua, the head of the Xiangxi Liaison Station of the Hunan Veterans' Home, who can be reached at +8615399957725

这26位老兵居住在中国湖南省湘西地区的不同地方，通常只能通过湖南老兵之家湘西联络站的负责人张中华先生联系，他的联络方式为+8615399957725

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Name of Interviewee 被采访人:

Wu Hewen 龙潭吴和文

Address and contact telephone number of Interviewee 被采访人联络方式:

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Name of Interviewee 被采访人:

Tang Dedong 龙潭唐德东

Address and contact telephone number of Interviewee 被采访人联络方式:

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Name of Interviewee 被采访人:

Shu Yingjie 淑浦舒英杰

Address and contact telephone number of Interviewee 被采访人联络方式:

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Name of Interviewee 被采访人:

Dai Xianyou 溆浦戴先友

Address and contact telephone number of Interviewee 被采访人联络方式:

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Name of Interviewee 被采访人:

Zhang Jiabai 溆浦张家柏

Address and contact telephone number of Interviewee 被采访人联络方式:

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Name of Interviewee 被采访人:

Liu Zhaojin 溆浦刘兆进

Address and contact telephone number of Interviewee 被采访人联络方式:

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Name of Interviewee 被采访人:

Zhou Youyuan 溱浦周友元

Address and contact telephone number of Interviewee 被采访人联络方式:

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Name of Interviewee 被采访人:

Shu Qingyu 溆浦舒清育

Address and contact telephone number of Interviewee 被采访人联络方式:

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Name of Interviewee 被采访人:

Yang Shangda 怀化杨尚达

Address and contact telephone number of Interviewee 被采访人联络方式:

The 26 veterans live in different parts of the Xiangxi region of Hunan Province, China, and can usually only be contacted through Mr. Zhang Zhonghua, the head of the Xiangxi Liaison Station of the Hunan Veterans' Home, who can be reached at +8615399957725

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Date: 04/11/2021

2021年11月04日

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Producer 制片人:

Qi Chen 陈琪

Title of Programme/Series 项目名称:

Reclaiming the status of marginalised groups-- combining expanded portraiture, documentary, and VR 通过肖像画、纪录片和虚拟现实技术重视边缘化群体

Name of Interviewee 被采访人:

Tang Zhaogui 怀化唐召贵

Address and contact telephone number of Interviewee 被采访人联络方式:

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Title of Programme/Series 项目名称:

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Name of Interviewee 被采访人:

Liu Weizhong 麻阳刘维忠

Address and contact telephone number of Interviewee 被采访人联络方式:

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Qi Chen 陈琪

Title of Programme/Series 项目名称:

Reclaiming the status of marginalised groups-- combining expanded portraiture, documentary, and VR 通过肖像画、纪录片和虚拟现实技术重视边缘化群体

Name of Interviewee 被采访人:

Zhang Liangfa 新晃张良法

Address and contact telephone number of Interviewee 被采访人联络方式:

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Name of Interviewee 被采访人:

Address and contact telephone number of Interviewee 被采访人联络方式:

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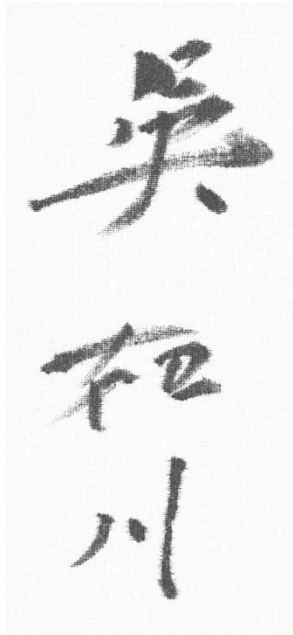
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Qi Chen 陈琪

Title of Programme/Series 项目名称:

Reclaiming the status of marginalised groups-- combining expanded portraiture, documentary, and VR 通过肖像画、纪录片和虚拟现实技术重视边缘化群体

Name of Interviewee 被采访人:

Yang Tianguang 新晃杨天光

Address and contact telephone number of Interviewee 被采访人联络方式:

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Name of Interviewee 被采访人:

Deng Qiyun 新晃邓启云

Address and contact telephone number of Interviewee 被采访人联络方式:

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Name of Interviewee 被采访人:

Liu Daomin 芷江刘道民

Address and contact telephone number of Interviewee 被采访人联络方式:

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Name of Interviewee 被采访人:

Wu Tinghai 芷江吴庭海

Address and contact telephone number of Interviewee 被采访人联络方式:

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Name of Interviewee 被采访人:

Long Chengfu 芷江龙成福

Address and contact telephone number of Interviewee 被采访人联络方式:

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Qi Chen 陈琪

Title of Programme/Series 项目名称:

Reclaiming the status of marginalised groups-- combining expanded portraiture, documentary, and VR 通过肖像画、纪录片和虚拟现实技术重视边缘化群体

Name of Interviewee 被采访人:

Li Kunyuan 芷江李坤元

Address and contact telephone number of Interviewee 被采访人联络方式:

The 26 veterans live in different parts of the Xiangxi region of Hunan Province, China, and can usually only be contacted through Mr. Zhang Zhonghua, the head of the Xiangxi Liaison Station of the Hunan Veterans' Home, who can be reached at +8615399957725

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Location of recording 录制地点:

Xiangxi region of Hunan Province, China。 中国湖南省怀化湘西地区。

Date of recording 录制时间:

From 01/10/2021 to 08/01/2023. 2021年10月1日至2023年1月8日

Nature of Contribution:

贡献的性质:

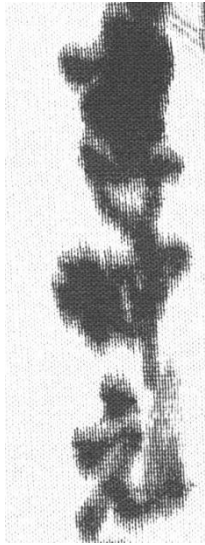
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Date: 14/11/2021

2021年11月14日

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Producer 制片人:

Qi Chen 陈琪

Title of Programme/Series 项目名称:

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Name of Interviewee 被采访人:

Xiao Shiyan 芷江肖世炎

Address and contact telephone number of Interviewee 被采访人联络方式:

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Name of Interviewee 被采访人:

Li Youhai 辰溪李右海

Address and contact telephone number of Interviewee 被采访人联络方式:

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Signature of Contributor 被采访者签名:

李右海

Date: 17/11/2021

2021年11月17日

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Producer 制片人:

Qi Chen 陈琪

Title of Programme/Series 项目名称:

Reclaiming the status of marginalised groups-- combining expanded portraiture, documentary, and VR 通过肖像画、纪录片和虚拟现实技术重视边缘化群体

Name of Interviewee 被采访人:

Hu Yinghe 辰溪胡应和

Address and contact telephone number of Interviewee 被采访人联络方式:

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Date: 18/11/2021

2021年11月18日

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Producer 制片人:

Qi Chen 陈琪

Title of Programme/Series 项目名称:

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Name of Interviewee 被采访人:

Qin Yupei 辰溪秦玉配

Address and contact telephone number of Interviewee 被采访人联络方式:

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玉
配

Date: 19/11/2021

2021年11月19日

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Name of Interviewee 被采访人:

Zhang Gan'ai 沅陵张干爱

Address and contact telephone number of Interviewee 被采访人联络方式:

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2021年11月22日

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Name of Interviewee 被采访人:

Gong Chengfu 沅陵龚成富

Address and contact telephone number of Interviewee 被采访人联络方式:

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Date: 23/11/2021

2021年11月23日