

SEAN KELLY

Cashdan, Marina. "Artist Sun Xun prepares to create a new body of work inside New York's Sean Kelly Gallery," *Surface Magazine*, December 2014.

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Artist Sun Xun prepares to create a new body of work inside New York's Sean Kelly Gallery.



Sun Xun at Sean Kelly Gallery in New York City.

"The only museum I had growing up was nature," says Sun Xun, who grew up in the Chinese city of Fuxin and spent part of his childhood with his uncle in a rural town. "I didn't know what a museum was. I think this was both lucky and unlucky—lucky because I could really touch and experience nature: real art."

Part of the Post-Mao generation born after 1975, the 34-year-old artist grew up in the aftermath of the Cultural Revolution. "As a child, I accepted two different kinds of parallel education: one from school and one from my father," he says. "There is history and there is the unknown world, [and] the unknown world is really good for artists, because you cannot simply create something that you can already see with your eyes; [instead] you have to find and create new things." It's defining this unknown that Sun has become known for, employing a variety of media, from traditional wood-block printing and ink drawing to animation, sculpture, watercolor, and film.

This versatility is what first captured the attention of New York dealer Sean Kelly, who opens Sun's latest solo exhibition on Dec. 13 (through Jan. 24, 2015). "What attracted us was the scale of ambition expressed in the work and the unique way he works with film, printmaking, drawing, and sculpture. He has such a command of all those art forms," says Kelly, who compares Sun to South African artist William Kentridge for his use of film and social critique. In 2006, Sun created his own animation studio, Pi, based in Beijing. In 2008, he presented his first exhibition at an American museum, in which he lived at the Hammer Museum in L.A. for over a week, creating a site-specific video and drawing installation. "The whole museum became my private world," he said of the experience. "I did it because I don't want to always stay in my usual world. If you change your everyday life, change your habits, then everything else changes."

Last year, Sun was featured in the acclaimed “Ink Art” exhibition at New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art, one of 35 artists including Xu Bing, Zhang Xuan, and Ai Weiwei. This month, Sun will create an entirely new body of works from within Sean Kelly’s Chelsea gallery. To prepare, the artist spent three months living in New York studying the city. “New York is many worlds in one,” he says. “In the gallery, in my exhibition, I want to give people another world. This is the most important part of the artist’s job.”

Having an artist live in a gallery poses logistical challenges, but Kelly isn’t fazed: “The challenges it presents are not about exhibiting static works of art, but about him working in the space, about the organic growth and unfolding of the project without boundaries or barriers.”