



Centre for
Contemporary
Asian Art

Holding Patterns

Part One: Kien Situ



There is a certain circular method of thinking and production to Kien Situ's work and practice. All the works exhibited as part of *Holding Patterns* share the same title, *Shanshui* 《山水》, compositional material, and decayed aesthetic, and were equally composed with rigorous mathematical precision and exacting physical labour. Situ's steles, columns, scrolls and plates are all dimensional multiples of four and eight, stemming from both an obsession with cultural Chinese superstition and the golden ratio of his western architectural education. The pieces demonstrate an idiosyncratic understanding of both gypsum plaster and *Mò* 《墨》 and their changing physical states during the creative process. While the decorative and architectural structures Situ reconstructs and destroys in his artistic practice shift in focus and scale, the artist always finds himself returning to a base of mathematics and culture to reflect upon and navigate the internal landscape of identity.

Shanshui refers to the traditional style of Chinese ink and brush landscape painting, literally translating to "mountain-water-picture", which rose to prominence during the Song Dynasty (960–1279). Prominently depicting mountains, rivers and waterfalls, the intent of *shanshui* was not to perfectly recreate nature in a formal sense but to capture an awareness of the artist's inner reality through the artistic exploration of a vast and unconquerable nature.

In an almost perfect coincidence, where there are three basic components to all *shanshui* paintings (Paths, The Threshold and The Heart) and three planes of perspective (yin, yang and balance), Situ's practice is also

held in patterns of three. The artist's overarching stages of design, formation and setting dictate the pace and flow of his practice with the momentum of a roller coaster: the considered design phase requires calculations of dimension and material quantity alongside research of the secular and sacred structures that Situ corrupts; the production phase in which Situ must work hard and fast to create both perfectly square edges and gravity-defying crags, plateaus and caverns of ink-stained plaster; and, the setting of the material, evoking a tense period of will-it or won't-it self-destruction.

Ultimately Situ's work presents the internal struggle and discussion of identity and the dichotomy of personal and cultural understanding of self. Exhibited in *Holding Patterns*, *Shanshui (Column)*, *Shanshui (Scroll)*, *Shanshui (Stele)* and *Shanshui (Wall Plate)* distort the form and purpose of functional and decorative objects found in domestic and sacred environments. Containing an ingrained textural tension, Situ's works seek to find balance in dimensional rigidity and gestural freedom within their crumbled and glutinous casting. Proudly depicting the hand of the artist, we see where Situ has carved peaks and caverns within sculptural landscapes that ask us to view them both as objects of formation and destruction. They reference an eroded memory of cultural signs and sadness in misguided function, signifying the artist's inherent disconnect from cultural heritage growing up as an Australian while entrenched in the Chinese and Vietnamese diaspora.

Cover image: Kien Situ, *Shanshui (Column)*, 2019, Chinese *Mò* ink and gypsum cement, 160 x 160 x 1040cm. Courtesy the artist.

LIST OF WORKS

Kien Situ, *Shanshui (Column)*, 2020, Chinese *Mò* ink, gypsum plaster, 136 x 24 x 24cm. Courtesy the artist.

Kien Situ, *Shanshui (Scroll)*, 2020, Chinese *Mò* ink, gypsum plaster, 88 x 64 x 8cm. Courtesy the artist.

Kien Situ, *Shanshui (Stele)*, 2020, Chinese *Mò* ink, gypsum plaster, 128 x 64 x 32cm. Courtesy the artist.

Kien Situ, *Shanshui (Wall Plate)*, 2020, Chinese *Mò* ink, gypsum plaster, 48 x 48 x 8cm. Courtesy the artist.

EXHIBITION ARTIST

Kien Situ (b. 1990, Sydney) is a sculpture and installation artist meditating on memory, cultural amnesia and identity in relation to the aesthetics of constructed objects and environments. Drawing upon familiar spatial, formal, textural, tectonic and material experience of his East Asian upbringing, Kien utilises and dissects his Eurocentric architectural education to create objects which reinterpret formative aesthetic and sensory experiences obfuscated by a diasporic childhood. His works are a physical melding of this experience, casting industrial gypsum cement with the regional, artistic material of Chinese *Mò* ink, a material central to the artist's practice as part of the investigation into the symbiotic relationship between geography, place and identity.

Curated by Con Gerakaris.

To find out more visit:
4a.com.au/holding-patterns

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