
Shen Xin
Highland Embassy
3 October – 21 December 2025

Highland Embassy by Shen Xin brings together three artworks or ‘stories’ from different highlands: the Isle of Skye, Scotland; British Columbia, Canada; and the Kham region of the Tibetan plateau. The mountainous and rural landscapes in the films and paintings act as backdrops to explore migration, belonging, and indigenous frameworks for languages and communities. Within each story, Shen Xin uses a ‘non-human’ ambassador (a wooden horse, cotoneaster plant, caterpillar fungus) to represent their *Highland Embassy* and to act as a non-violent storyteller to connect the reader to the landscape.

This exhibition forms part of *We Contain Multitudes*, a collaborative project that seeks to address ableism in the visual arts sector.

A large print and an audio version of this text are available. There is also a tactile library, an audio description of the installation, and audio notes for each film. Just ask one of our Welcome Assistants for more information.

Solar Wheels, 2024 (28 mins)

Solar Wheels was shot on Super 8 film in the Indigenous Ṭsilhqoṭ’in (pronounced ‘Chilcotin’) territory in Canada. Led by the sounds of the landscape, the camera leads the viewer to the lakes, forests, and often upside-down vistas, while we listen to birdsong and the traditional Uyghur story of the Wooden Horse. The story, written in Shen Xin’s own words, describes the adventure of a flying wooden horse made by a skilled carpenter, ridden by a prince to a faraway land where he meets a princess trapped in a castle in the sky.

The film narrates the story in 31 short chapters. Translated subtitles of the Uyghur voice are delayed, so viewers have to wait for them to appear – reflecting the global migration of the story over hundreds of years and how language begins as an oral tradition before being recorded, translated and shared in written form.

By connecting the Uyghur story with Ṭsilhqoṭ’in territory, Shen Xin explores a kinship of indigenous land and language. The majestic horse symbolises this connection, both through the story but also through China’s recent wild horse

repatriation efforts, and Elegasi Qayus Wild Horse Preserve created by the Xeni Gwet’in First Nation. *Solar Wheels* was created with the support of Xeni Gwet’in First Nations Government and communities.

bearing fruit of fondness, 2024 (6 mins)

Filmed in the Isle of Skye, where Shen Xin lives and works, this 16mm black and white film features the cotoneaster plant. Cotoneaster was brought to the UK in the 19th century as an ornamental plant, native to Eastern Asia and southwestern China (Sichuan, Tibet, Yunnan, etc.). Shen Xin used the leaves to make a photographic developer to hand-process the 16mm film, creating an inviting imperfection to the images on screen.

bearing fruit of fondness captures stormy days in Shen Xin’s home and garden. Choppy waves and blustery winds interchange with local animals: a domesticated dog; farmer’s cows; and wild seals. The sound of the storm is paired with Shen Xin’s reading of a long poem. It is read aloud in one swift outburst of breath before inhaling and continuing, mimicking the sound of the wind. Creating an atmospheric work, the physical storm is also reflected in

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the story's multiple mother-child relationships – from the literal mother and child, to nation and citizen, and human to land.

The Child of the Mountain, 2025

The Child of the Mountain (“རྒྱུ་བྱ” in Tibetan) is a short children's story written by Shen Xin with traditional folkloric narratives related to community and oral traditions. It follows a lonely and grieving child who picks caterpillar fungi in the Tibetan plateau. The child connects with an unknown elder who tells them that “if the child wants to ease the pain of being alone, they should not enter the room where the food is stored this winter, and stay inside come next summer harvest.”

It is a cautionary tale about the overharvesting of caterpillar fungi, but also highlights the global destruction of natural resources which are harvested before they have a chance to replenish. The short story is printed onto the gallery wall in both English and Tibetan using handmade plant-based inks from devil's-bit scabious (*Succisa pratensis*) and hardy fuchsia (*Fuchsia magellanica*). It is accompanied by six oil paintings illustrating the narrative.

Library

A selection of books chosen by Shen Xin – providing context on the exhibition, their practice and interests – is available in our Library in the City Observatory.

About the artist

Shen Xin is an artist and filmmaker from Chengdu, China, who lives and works in the Isle of Skye, Scotland. Their practice encompasses moving image, installation, performance, sound, and text to explore socio-political and ecological narratives of belonging and migration. Creating environments for immersive storytelling, Shen Xin challenges dominant narratives to propose alternative modes of understanding that are rooted in relation, place, and political agency.

Recent solo exhibitions include *but this is the language we met in*, Richmond Art Gallery, Richmond (2024); *one, arriving at floodplains*, Madeln Gallery, Shanghai (2023); *Brine Lake (A New Body)*, M HKA, Antwerp (2023) and Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (2022); ས་གནས་སྒྲོ་པོ། རྒྱུ་བྱ། (*THE EARTH TURNED GREEN*), Kunstverein Gartenhaus, Vienna (2023) and Swiss Institute, New York (2022).

Glossary

Uyghurs: Turkic-speaking, mostly Muslim people of Central and East Asia.

Xeni Gwet'in: First Nations people whose territory is in the southern Tsilhqot'in District of British Columbia.

Cotoneaster: A versatile, hardy shrub from the Rosaceae (rose) family, known for its small, waxy leaves, white or pink flowers in late spring, and red or pink berries in autumn.

Caterpillar fungus: A fungus that grows on insects. Harvesters dig up the entire caterpillar with the attached fungus, which is then cleaned and sold for its value in traditional medicine.

Tibet: A high-altitude region in Asia, north of the Himalayas.

Ableism: A system of assigning value to people's bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, productivity, desirability, intelligence, excellence, and fitness. (definition source: Talila A. Lewis)

With thanks to Shen Xin, and everyone who has supported the exhibition, including:
Angelo Castiglioni, Rob Kennedy, WarPro
And the whole Collective team.

A full list of artist credits is available in the gallery.

We Contain Multitudes is a partnership between Collective, Dundee Contemporary Arts (DCA), and LUX Scotland, and is supported by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation.

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