

# PearlLam Projects

Hong Kong

Pearl Lam Projects presents QIU ANXIONG: BEARING THE UNSEEN,  
coinciding with Art Basel Hong Kong

Vernissage Monday, 23 March, 2026, 2–8pm  
Exhibition dates 24 March–3 June, 2026 Monday–Saturday, 10am–7pm  
Venue Pearl Lam Projects, G–3/F, W Place, 52 Wyndham Street, Central, Hong Kong



L–R: QIU ANXIONG b. 1972, **Feeling the Mountains and Knowing the Waters—Like the Moon of the Lute**, 2025, Acrylic on canvas, 150 x 100 cm (59 x 39 3/8 in.)

QIU ANXIONG b. 1972, **Peach Blossom Spring Wonderland—Encounter with a Snake**, 2025, Ink and colour on silk, 135.5 x 180.6 x 5 cm (53 3/8 x 71 1/8 x 2 in.)

QIU ANXIONG b. 1972, Still from **New Classic of Mountains and Seas Part 3**, 2013–2017, Digital video, 30min  
Courtesy of the artist and Pearl Lam

Hong Kong—Guided by the aesthetics of Chinese ink painting and deeply rooted in classical Chinese philosophy, Shanghai-based artist Qiu Anxiong, for more than two decades, has developed a singular artistic language that moves fluidly between painting, animation, installation, and time-based media. In his work, he articulates a condition he describes as “modernity in flux” that is marked by instability, mutation, and profound moral ambiguity. To him, modern civilisation is an unsettled terrain haunted by spiritual dissonance.

At a time when the use of artificial intelligence increasingly blurs what is real, Qiu reexamines our relationship with nature and the desire to dominate and control it. He does not abandon tradition in the face of modernity. Instead, he uses classical sources, Western anthropology, ancient Chinese mythological texts such as the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, and Zhuangzi’s notion of equality of all things to rescript the chaotic phenomena of the contemporary world.

*Bearing the Unseen* presents a new body of landscape paintings depicting a dystopian natural world inhabited by displaced animals and human figures to address our fractured relationship with nature. Drawing formally from the literati tradition of Chinese ink painting, Qiu's visualisation no longer resorts only to mountains and rivers; instead, cities, industrial zones, surveillance and digital networks have become the new infrastructure for defining contemporary life.

The exhibition's title itself carries layered meanings. "Bearing" suggests enduring and bearing witness to the human control of nature. "The Unseen", or Wu Zhi (無智), a Buddhist term, refers to transcending conventional wisdom by adopting a primordial way of seeing. Animals occupy a central role within Qiu's paintings. The depictions of animistic figures are meant to bear witness to the inherent violence embedded in our society, yet these figures remain stable and embody a quiet resilience. Conversely, human subjects appear fragile and disoriented, losing their spiritual bearings. In essence, Qiu challenges our anthropocentric worldview, suggesting a new state where humans, animals, and machines can coexist on equal ontological ground. Through stop frame animation, video, and painting, the exhibition creates an immersive environment charged with contradictions, encouraging viewers to contemplate the psychological toll inflicted at the expense of economic progress. The exhibition is broken down into three main sections as follows:

1. To seek release from predicament, "釋然" is directed at a state of calmness after doubts have been cast away. The word first appeared in Liu Yiqing's *A New Account of the Tales of the World* (世說新語) during the Song Dynasty.

*Fly to South* (2006) is an early animation by Qiu that evokes the seasonal rhythms of the natural world. Flying wild geese struck down by gunshots, stacks of books burning in fires, volumes fleeing from library shelves, and caged birds dying allude to the ideological and ecological challenges facing humanity. Modern history has always been marked by many crises along the way, and the search for a spiritual release is more pressing than ever.

With reference to *The Golden Bough*, a comparative study of mythology and religion, written by 19th century British anthropologist Sir James George Frazer, Qiu's series by the same name conveys the notion of "re-enchanting a disenchanted world". Qiu constructs a heterotopia where tradition and the future intertwine. In *The Golden Bough—Wild Hot Spring 3* (2023), multiple figures stand inside a hot spring hidden by snow-capped pine trees, quietly observing a herd of deer from a distance. By juxtaposing a serene landscape with an element of modern comfort, this painting reflects on our longing for a spiritual refuge and self-healing in a chaotic world.

*Feeling the Mountain and Knowing the Waters—Like the Moon of the Lute* (2025) depicts a pair of rabbits, one black and one white, resting quietly by rocks set against a tranquil waterside under a hazy moonlight. The black and white pair symbolises the dualistic principles of yin and yang in the universe, echoing the waning phases of the moon. The white bridge at a distance introduces a subtle tension with the deep blue lake.

2. Dystopian prophecy: This section centres on the video animation *New Classics of Mountains and Seas 3* (2013–2017), the final chapter of Qiu's seminal trilogy. Depicting everyday scenes of a dystopic society where every aspect of life has been fully integrated with cyber technology, Qiu integrates hand-drawn animation and 3D design software into the making process. In a fictional city wrapped in virtual holograms, the streets are deserted, and due to our total reliance on technology, people are addicted to virtual entertainment and the illusory world they have created. The fall of humanity has made the real city completely uninhabitable. On view with the video is a small selection of black-and-white ink wash paintings that Qiu used for making this film.

In *New Classic of Mountains and Seas—Watering Horses at a Limpid Stream* (2026), Qiu draws inspiration from the traditional green-and-blue landscape style of the Tang and Song dynasties.

Two horses stand quietly in a clear river, evoking a sense of harmony and serenity within nature. Above them, an octopus-like modern aircraft, reimagined from motifs in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, floats in the sky. This hybrid entity symbolises the unchecked expansion of modern civilisation and serves to deconstruct time and space through a surreal visual narrative.

*Sound of Chiaroscuro* (2009) is a poignant video focusing on the burning process of a single candle in darkness. The artist deliberately strips away its grand narratives, emphasising the flickering light as a metaphor for the burden and temporal quality of life itself.

3. Equality of All Things: Zhuangzi claims that everyone has a different viewpoint based on their own subjective experiences, and no one's perspective is empirically absolute. Therefore, we must learn to adapt a non-anthropocentric perspective and to accept all things as they are.

*Jiangnan Poem* (2005) is Qiu's first digital media work that records the fleeting movement of birds on a tree. These seemingly mundane moving images, presented with the sound of a siren playing in the background, suggest an ecological crisis is coming, yet animals will always be able to find a way to adapt to new conditions despite their fragility.

Based on the tale "Xiaoqing" from *Strange Tales from a Chinese Studio*, *Peach Blossom Spring Wonderland—Encounter with a Snake* (2025) captures the reunion between the snake charmer and the serpent he once tamed. In this painting, a man in dark robes faces a massive turquoise snake coiled along the shore. Qiu explores the bond between domestication and the wilderness through a quiet yet charged encounter. In relation to the **Classic of Mountains and Seas**, Qiu reinterprets classical mythology with a series of paintings on silk for diagnosing the present. *New Classic of Mountains and Seas* (2026) represents divine beasts that give way to drones, hybrid forms, and vehicles. Technological progress is reframed as a monstrous form of animism.

*Fading of God—Deer Calls in the Secluded Valley* (2026) transforms a traditional Chinese green-and-blue landscape into a mysterious and tranquil world. Sika deer with climbing ferns growing out of their heads coexist with an owl hidden among the bushes, blending into the swirling clouds and mist. In the distance, a car resembling a monster suggests the symbiotic relationship between civilisation and nature. This work expresses a spiritual yearning for harmony and a peaceful coexistence with nature.

*Listening to the Qin—Deerfield* (2026) is a diptych consisting of a painting and a video. Displayed side by side are a still image of two deer resting in the woods and a video of Qiu's acquaintance performing with a guqin inside a misty forest. The deliberate use of tree lines to connect both scenes of animals and humans into a poetic composition evokes solitude and disrupts our conventional reading of the narrative quality of the painting.

The exhibition *Bearing the Unseen* entices viewers to dwell within uncertainty, to confront the unseen forces shaping our world, and to reconsider what it means to be at one with nature and to rekindle our inherent instinct in an age saturated by technology. Through Qiu's poetic vision, animals emerge not only as witnesses to human exploitation but as mirrors reflecting our shared destiny.

## About Qiu Anxiong

Qiu Anxiong, born in 1972 in Sichuan Province, graduated from the Sichuan Academy of Fine Arts in 1994 and from the Kassel School of Art in Germany in 2003. He is currently a professor at the College of Design of East China Normal University, a member of the Experimental Art Committee of the China Artists Association, and a judge for the National Art Exhibition.

Qiu Anxiong is a key figure in Chinese contemporary art known for merging traditional ink painting with experimental animation and video. His work is significant because it rethinks how China's past, present, and future are visually imagined within global contemporary art discourse. Qiu often uses hand-painted, black-and-white imagery animated frame by frame, visually echoing classical ink-and-brush literati painting while presenting scenes of industrialisation, ecological crisis, and social transformation. His works frequently stage tensions between myth and technology, nature and urbanisation, and individual memory and collective history, turning Chinese modernisation into a poetic but unsettling visual narrative.

Qiu is often cited as one of the most accomplished animation-based artists of his generation in China, helping to legitimise animation and moving image as central, not peripheral, forms within Chinese contemporary art and inspiring younger artists. His education at major art academies and his presence in international exhibitions have also helped connect Chinese experimental moving-image practices to global conversations on modernity, environmental crisis, and post-socialist change.

Conceptually, Qiu's practice offers a distinctive vision of "modernity in flux", emphasising instability, mutation, and moral ambiguity rather than a simple story of progress. This makes his work an important reference point for scholars and curators analysing how Chinese artists respond to rapid urbanisation, political shifts, and globalisation without reducing these issues to straightforward critique.

As a leading figure in contemporary ink animation, his works are part of the collections of prestigious international and domestic institutions, including The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA, New York), Brooklyn Museum (New York), Centre Pompidou (Paris), Arken Museum of Modern Art (Copenhagen), Power Station of Art (Shanghai), Spencer Museum of Art (University of Kansas), Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo (MOT), Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art (Oslo), Kunsthalle Zürich, and M+ Museum of Contemporary Art (Hong Kong).

He has held solo exhibitions at renowned institutions such as the Fosun Foundation (Shanghai), Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, Arken Museum of Modern Art (Copenhagen), Spencer Museum of Art (University of Kansas), and Crow Museum of Asian Art (Dallas). His work has also been featured in major international and domestic exhibitions, including **Ink Art: Past as Present in Contemporary China** at The Metropolitan Museum of Art (New York), the São Paulo Biennial, the Sydney Biennale, the Cairo Biennale, the Thessaloniki Biennale, the Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, and the Busan Biennale.

## About Pearl Lam Projects

Pearl Lam Projects is an international programme of off-site exhibitions and artistic collaborations. Building on the gallery's permanent space in Shanghai, the programme operates across numerous cities, including Hong Kong, enabling the gallery to present work by and expand opportunities for its diverse roster of international artists beyond its year-round gallery programme.


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