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## Tuo Wang's 'multi-narrative spectacles' on display at Riverviews Artspace

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Jill Nance/The News &amp; Advance

Tuo Wang sets up his exhibit, "Chorus," last week at Riverviews Artspace. It includes a mix of video projections, 2-D canvases and mixed-media paintings.

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Posted: Thursday, January 14, 2016 5:00 am

Emma Schkloven

Moving faces flash simultaneously across various screens and the white-

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Multiple screens play during the exhibit.

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“We were particularly interested that it was going to be video installation art ‘cause that’s not something we see a lot of, so it’s always interesting to bring in something new that’s a little different from the usual,” says Sylvia Noyes, exhibitions and program manager at Riverviews, where Wang’s exhibition, “Chorus,” opened Jan. 8.

“I think a lot of people, when they first start pursuing art, video is not one of the things you are immediately introduced to when you are a student and you’re looking into a career [in] the arts. I think that has something to do with it.”



Wang’s video installations, which serve as the core of his narrative, alternate between performance- and documentary-style stories.

“I have developed a process that combines interview, reality show-style montage and Theatre of the Absurd to construct a maze of melodramas,” Wang says in his artist statement.

painted walls in Riverviews Artspace’s Craddock-Terry Gallery.

The footage emits a faint glow in the darkened room as scenes flicker, like modern-day, moving cave art depicting stories as old as time.

Scenes of love. Scenes of isolation. Scenes of (staged) murder.

New York-based interdisciplinary artist Tuo Wang, 31, incorporates various mediums into his work, including video, performance, painting, photography, sculptural objects and text to create what he describes as “multi-narrative spectacles.”

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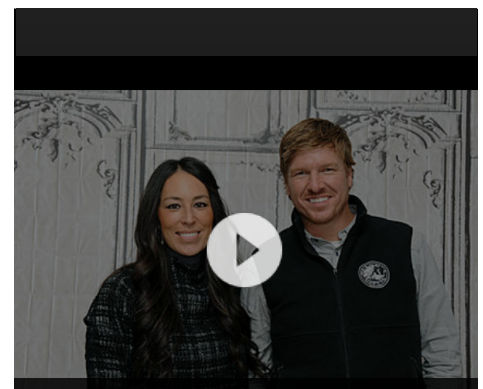
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For instance, in the project “Vanitas - A Study for Human Opera” — an examination of adultery and murders of passion that serves as the main part of “Chorus” — Wang presented various scenarios to his interview subjects and asked them to use their imaginations to respond to the situations from their own point of view.

The scenarios were based on two books, Theodore Fontane’s “Effi Briest” and Émile Zola’s “Thérèse Raquin.” Wang recorded their responses, and then manipulated them during the editing process.

Through projects like “Vanitas,” Wang explores the unreliability of original memory, predefined identity and his subject’s connection and interaction to what he calls the “cultural archive,” the group of ideas and concepts society has ingrained in a person’s brain to accept or reject, to dislike or appreciate.

A current artist-in-residence at the Queens Museum whose work has been displayed in Taiwan, Albania, Egypt and across the U.S., Wang began to develop his distinctive artistic style after he left China in 2012 to study at Boston University.

“I needed to explore my own explanation or definition of performance, so that’s when in late 2013 I started doing performance ... not using my own body but using people’s intelligence and lived experience to do the performance for me,” he says.

“Chorus,” which runs through Feb. 19, features sections from four of his previous projects, including “Paying Homage to Buddha for Three Incenses,” the last piece he completed before moving to the U.S., and the aforementioned “Vanitas.”



“It’s almost like a retrospective about my own history,” he says. “The first performance I did and the most important direction I have right now and also some important practice during the way. It’s kind of a conclusion of my personal practice for now.”

The exhibition incorporates video projections on white walls and TV and

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computer monitors. The accompanying audio is played either over the speakers or through headphones, which creates an interactive and immersive audience experience.

Sprinkled throughout the gallery are 2-D canvas and mixed-media painting portions of “Paying Homage to Buddha for Three Incenses” and “Vanitas.”

“He is a storyteller. There’s a lot of narrative going on,” Noyes says. “He’s influenced by literature. He’s also influenced by the crossing of cultures being someone from China who’s now living in the United States and his culture experiences. [The exhibit] is very different from anything you’ve seen in Lynchburg, which is really exciting.”

Here’s more of what Wang had to say about his work:

### **How did you develop this style of video storytelling over time?**

“My bachelors is in biology and I worked two years as a researcher in a science lab. ... The main reason why I switched [was] I really kind of balanced my [personal] interest [in art and literature] and my career. I really wanted to go see films every day; I really wanted to listen to music all the time. It’s like it tortured me because it was wasting time for me because it was taking up my time ... that I should [use to] do the research.

“I have a lot of interest in different kinds of knowledge and, personally, I want to set up a connection [between] people. I think for me, doing art is also like doing science research. It’s not something [where] you follow your basic instinct or you follow just to follow your personal aesthetic and you make something based on your feelings. ... You have to do something based on a lot of the research and that research has to lead to something, sort of like an argument.”

### **You describe your work as “multi-narrative spectacles.” What makes them spectacles?**

“I think it’s not just one media, that’s pretty important. Different medias could be functional as a narrative, but they’re functional very differently. ... If this is just a show of videos, I cannot say it’s a narrative spectacle because it’s one type of media and it functions in just a singular way. But if ... you do research [about one single subject matter] from different directions — like I have videos and I have paintings and sculptures and also text — it’s like you’re receiving all the information from a different resource. And this resource will make this whole canvas not as flat as a surface. It’s going to be constructed into something like a system. That



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system is like a spectacle. In this space, you're overwhelmed with the different kinds of [information] which is talking about similar subject matter and that will help you get into the depth of the research."

### **What comes first: the videos or the other mediums?**

"I think the video comes first to me. That's why after several years of doing paintings, I started to do videos. I think the advantage of a video while you're watching it is it's very direct and it's kind of fast. So, for most ... of the narrative, you can provide a lot of the [information] in a very short time. Video is like going to a restaurant and they serve you the main course right away and the paintings [are] like a very good cup of coffee or tea. They give you a different layer; they give you a different dimension."

### **How does the manipulation work?**

"The manipulation is a key practice of my performance 'cause even nowadays, probably 60 or 70 percent of performing artists are still using their own bodies to explore the boundaries. It's kind of the definition of performance. I can want to do it in a different way because I think the human body, especially the artist's body, is not the best materials for performance art. ... Here in my practice, the materials for my performance [are] people's lived experience and people's memories and people's entireties. So the manipulation as action is the performance itself. I manipulate people's experience and memories to do a performance. ... Right now it's like an interview, this manipulation, but later, it's going to be something different."

### **What do you hope audiences take away from "Chorus"?**

"One thing of my practice is I want people to get into the space and listen to the story. Of course, from my experience, a lot of people, they're confused and a lot of people, when they finish watching the videos, they ask me 'Is it a real story?' They believe they're actors. ... This is not acting. This is a process of an interview; this is a process of a performance. Because when they see those questions [which are projected], when you answer those questions unconsciously, your answers will set up a connection with the narration you just saw."

"When people get into this space, what I expect is probably people can just have some question marks and those question marks will lead to people asking, of course, if it's reality or if it's fiction. If it's acting or if it's performance. And also, people can ask [about] the connection between the relationship between real life and the archives we have."

Contact Emma Schkloven at (434) 385-5489 or [eschkloven@newsadvance.com](mailto:eschkloven@newsadvance.com).

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