

## *Better City, Better Life*

### **Jenny Gong**

My artwork, *Better city, Better life*, is a four-part watercolour series that expresses the idea of man and nature living in a harmony. My paintings depict surrealist landscapes of cities and rural areas in China. I have fused traditional Chinese and modern-urban architecture with environmental sceneries. I was interested in how these settings rely on one another to survive. Buildings and skyscrapers need natural elements of the earth to be built, while the earth and trees regenerate and give us air to live. Stories and history lie in the walls of the traditional Chinese buildings and give China its rich architectural aesthetic. However, for too long man has been relying heavily on the earth's natural resources and if we continue to carry on as we are, the once precious history of my country can one day become a distant memory. Through my art, I wanted to rethink the relationship between nature and its symbiotic relationship with urbanisation.

In my process of researching different practitioners, artists like Hayao Miyazaki (best known for his animated films, *Spirited Away* and *Princess Mononoke*) inspired my work. From his concept art and animated film, I explored his wonderful, controlled use of line and colour and his ability to show intricate depth and detail in his subject matter. As an animator, his work centres on the idea that we, as humans, have the responsibility to protect the environment. Miyazaki believes that we have become lost in the busyness of life – the characters and sceneries that he depicts are representations of humans failing to reconnect with themselves and nature. Although the majority of his films are computer generated, I am so intrigued by his compositional methods and use of colour. Miyazaki's colour palette is bright and intense, complemented by transparent shapes and free flowing lines, creating a sense of 'magic' and wonderment in his work.

For my art, I chose watercolour paint as my main medium. The intense pigments and fluidity of the paint connects with Miyazaki's style. Therefore, in my folio, I experimented with designing and painting different sceneries, merging pictures together to better understand how to compose all of the various elements in one image. Unlike Miyazaki's style, I was drawn to using softer tones and colours not often associated with the objects I would be representing.

During my painting process, there are many challenges and difficulties I needed to overcome. In one of my practical pieces, I attempted to build a world combining the cities of Xining and Lhasa. Both of these cities are located in the plateau of China. The highest point in the plateau is 4,000 metres above sea level. Because of this, great clouds and fog coats the cities, creating a magical effect. To give more depth to my painting, I decided to enhance the image using the colour green. Green emblems "life". The origin of three main rivers of China is located at Xining, rivers always are the source of human culture. Violet is the colour I choose for Lhasa, as the blue sky and red palace are the strongest representations of this city. However, these bold choices in colour presented a challenge as I completed the picture. Therefore, the difference between shade and light became critical in order to soften the atmosphere of my paintings.

Across the four paintings, the architecture sits between nature, while the natural scenery embraces the city; there is no clear boundary between the architecture and the natural landscape. A recurrent image across the paintings is the use of the pink cherry blossoms and moving bodies of water. A cherry blossom tree is a highly symbolic flower of spring. While its life span is very short, the flower represents the state of renewal and how life can be fleeting. Like the blossoms, water is also a symbol for life. It is often associated with birth, fertility, and refreshment. I have painted the water flowing through landscapes and buildings as a symbol for the life continuously passing by. The relationship between man and nature is a perpetual topic, and like the cherry blossom tree or the rapid currents of a river, it can be fleeting and short lived. Therefore, people need to be responsible for their environment, and to remember that we have a significant role in how our futures will be carried out.