

NEW YORK EXHIBITION

TANGIBLE EXPRESSION

After shifting from music to visual art more than a decade ago, Ai Jing achieves both recognition and satisfaction on two sides of the globe, **Chen Nan** reports.

Visual art has become Chinese singer-songwriter Ai Jing's passion over the past decade.

In November, she will stage her solo exhibition, *Ai Jing Back to New York*, at the Marlborough Gallery in New York City, with nearly 30 artworks created over the past decade, including sculptures, oil paintings and installations.

The works on display include *My Mom and My Hometown*, a tapestry of wool patches knitted by Ai's mother and bedecked with the English word "Love"; *The Tree of Life*, an installation work showing a lonely raven perched on a leafless oak tree made of tens of thousands of disposable chopsticks; and oil paintings under the group name *I Love Color*.

"New York is an important city for my transition from a musician to an artist. I always want to revisit the origin of my passion for visual art with my own works," says the 46-year-old artist, who announced the exhibition at the National Museum of China in Beijing on Tuesday.

In 1999, she started learning painting with renowned Chinese contemporary artist Zhang Xiaogang. Years later, Ai had reached a level high enough to hold a solo exhibition, *I Love Ai Jing*, at the National Museum of China in Beijing in 2012 and again at the China Art Museum of Shanghai in 2014.

A native of Shenyang, Liaoning province, Ai learned music with her father, who plays the *erhu* (a two-stringed bowed instrument).

Her debut album, *My 1997*, sold more than 200,000 copies within one month of its release in 1993. Her second album, *Once Upon a Time on Yanfen Street*, was another success, which brought her recognition outside the Chinese mainland,



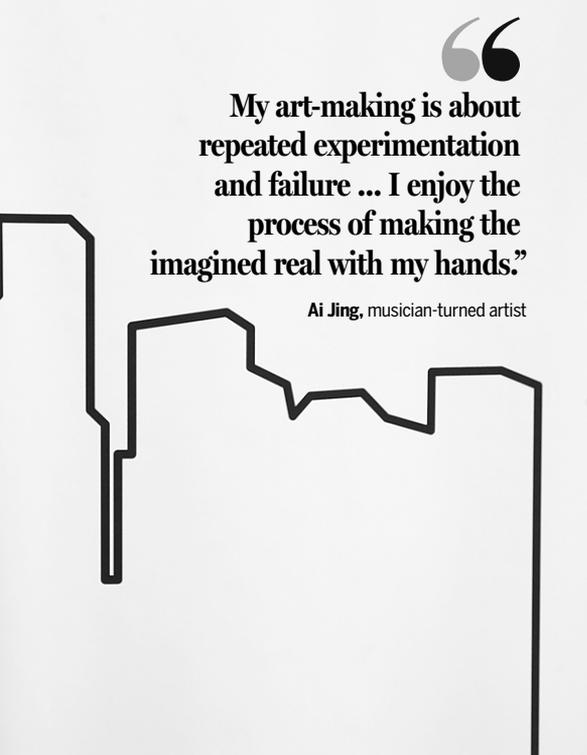
Ai Jing will hold a solo show in November in New York City, where she had lived for years and started her pursuit of visual art. Works on display will include the installations *The Tree of Life* (left) and *Wave*. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

including in Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan — a rarity for mainland singers then.

She first went to New York in 1997 to seek inspiration for the album, *Made in China*, and she wrote most

of the songs for the album while living there.

Her apartment was near Central Park, where the tall buildings and graffiti gave her imagery of a vibrant and experimental art scene. She



JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY



lived in the Lower East Side from 2002 to 2008. She had her studio and honed her skills as an artist there.

"I often went to museums and galleries in New York. The city was like

a kaleidoscope to me. It was not just visual enjoyment, but also awakened my desire to use visual art as a new expression, which music could not deliver anymore," she says. In the summer of 2009, Ai was

commissioned to do a work for a group exhibition, *The Drop-Urban Art Infill*, in New York. She presented recorded sounds with pictures of 10 different places in New York, including the noise of a construction site, and a peaceful afternoon in Harlem — the northern section of New York City, where people walked in the sun and the music of Bob Marley played. The same year, she held her solo exhibition, *Ai Want to Love*, in New York.

In 2008, Ai left New York and established a studio in Beijing, devoting herself to working as a professional artist.

Marcia Levine, special projects director of Marlborough Gallery, first met Ai in New York in 2015. She flew to Italy to see Ai's exhibition, *Dialogues*, at the Ambrosian Art Gallery of the Veneranda Biblioteca Ambrosiana Museum in Milan.

With the themes of industry, nature and technology, Ai created a "dialogue" through her works with selected masterpieces at the museum, which is known for its collection of 12 manuscripts by Leonardo da Vinci.

"I was amazed by the beauty and strength of her works. She showed us that art could connect East and West in a cultural way and we want to present her works to the people in the US," says Levine, who is in Beijing this week with Ai.

She also says that the gallery, which was founded in 1946 with two spaces in New York as well as locations, such as London, Madrid and Monaco, has been working closely with Chinese artists since the 1990s, including the late Chinese-French artist, Zao Wou-ki.

"Ai is very special as a contemporary Chinese artist because her works show a mixture of Eastern and Western influences," says Chen Lyusheng, deputy director of the National Museum of China, who curated Ai's exhibitions in Beijing, Shanghai and Milan.

Looking back on her journey as an artist, Ai says that she often asks herself two questions: What is art? Why I am making art?

"My art-making is about repeated experimentation and failure. Usually, I go through starvation, sleepless nights and anxiety to finish one piece. But I enjoy the process of making the imagined real with my hands," she says.

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CASH CUTS

US schools approach Hollywood for assistance

By ASSOCIATED PRESS
in Los Angeles

Miles from the Hollywood Walk of Fame and the red carpet, Steve Shin belts out tunes on a piano scarred with nicks and love notes written in scratches, teaching children how to sing.

In scores of other middle schools, his students might have already learned how to read the notes on a scale. But years of cuts have stripped arts classes from much of the Los Angeles district, leaving many children in the world's entertainment capital with no instruction in music, visual arts, dance or theater.

When Shin arrived for the first day of class, he quickly realized many of his students were starting from zero.

"A lot of them didn't even know they were going to be in a music class," he says.

Now the second-largest school district in the United States is trying to enlist Hollywood studios to "adopt" schools and provide students with equipment, mentorship and training as a way to reverse the layoffs that have decimated the curriculum.

The financial picture is slowly changing. The arts budget has grown to \$26.5 million, about 40 percent higher than five years ago, but still a fraction of the \$76.8 million sum that was once available for the arts. For the next school year, it will increase to \$32.3 million.



Steve Shin (left) instructs a group of students singing during a music class at Stevenson Middle School in East Los Angeles. AP

In 2014, the district hired former TV writer and producer Rory Pullens as its executive director for arts education. He has since hired an arts teacher at every school.

Pullens is convinced his work in a district that has 90 percent minority students will one day help diversify Hollywood — a widely discussed goal after the criticism of this year's all-white list of Academy Award acting nominees. He has already met with Paramount, Universal and dozens of other industry leaders to solicit help.

"It is well within all of our powers, if we work together, to remedy that by really addressing the deep-rooted symptoms and not just trying to put in a couple remedies on the surface," Pullens says.

The renewed push for arts education in LA comes as new federal education policies stir hope that schools will begin shifting more time and money toward classes such as dance and drama.

Film and music studios have chipped in to help Los Angeles schools before, but their contributions tended to focus on the schools directly in their backyard:

Warner Bros has provided funding to improve auditoriums at Burbank schools. Sony Entertainment Pictures has run career workshops at Culver City schools.

To date, the Los Angeles district has confirmed partnerships with Nickelodeon, Sunset Bronson Studios and Sunset Gower Studios.

Most of the donations have not reached students yet.

In Shin's class, students get by with the bare minimum: an overhead projector displaying lyrics across the screen, two microphones and two standing lights placed in front of the class to make a stage-like performance space.

Shin calls on students as if they're performing in a real concert in front of their peers. On a recent afternoon, they sang everything from Mexican ballads to angst-ridden songs by Adele.

Terry Quintero, 12, had never been in a music class before and now dreams of becoming a professional singer.

When she's singing, Quintero says, she leaves everything that's troubling her behind. "What matters right now," she says, "is this class."

LIVE SHOW

Horses prepare for stardom in Beijing

By CHEN NAN

Normand Latourelle, co-founder of the Montreal-based Cirque du Soleil, has dreamed of coming to China since childhood.

"I once asked my mother: 'How can I get to China?' She said: 'Dig a hole in the kitchen, and you will be there at the end of it,'" Latourelle recalls.

Decades later, he has not just arrived in China but also brought his 30 horses, who are the stars of Latourelle's brainchild — the multimedia spectacular, *Cavalia*.

Cooperating with the Chinese investment company Sinocap, Latourelle and his team, including his son and tour manager, Mathieu Latourelle, will stage the show in Beijing from April 28 to May 8.

Cavalia is a mix of acrobatics and equestrian arts, and Chinese audiences will enjoy it in a white tent, called the "big top", that covers more than 2,000 square meters and is pitched at a height of 35 meters in Beijing's Chaoyang Park.

During a recent visit to a farm more than 40 kilometers from downtown Beijing where the horses are kept, Latourelle says that he found the animals were resting and grazing peacefully there.

Most of the equestrian team of about 20, including a veterinarian, health technicians, grooms and a farrier, are training the horses on a daily basis. Each horse performs for roughly 12 minutes. The rest of their daily activities include warmups, recouping, grooming, going to the paddocks outside and free time.

"The *Cavalia* approach is based on training methods designed to make sure the horses enjoy training as well as performing onstage. The horse training is based upon a



The multimedia show *Cavalia* will be staged in Beijing in April. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

philosophy of understanding the needs, the preferences and the emotions of the four-legged stars," says Latourelle, who has 46 years of experience in creating and staging live spectacles.

Cavalia was born as an idea around 15 years ago to pay tribute to the bond between the animals and people.

Keith Dupont is one of the riders in the Beijing performance. The Belgian joined in *Cavalia* five years ago and quickly became a star in the show due to his gentle, patient and effective way of communicating with the horses. He is working with six to eight Arabian horses.

"I love the horses and the stage. The job is a perfect combination for

me," he says. "Each horse has a different personality. Some are curious, and some are aggressive."

Latourelle says: "Keith communicates with the horses with soft voice commands and body movements. He is on the ground, and the horses have no saddle, no rope, no bridle, nothing. It's a very beautiful and emotional number in the show."

Chinese director-actor Zhang Guoli attended the ticket-sale launching ceremony in Beijing on March 17. He says he was amazed when he watched the show in Canada.

"I am very eager to watch it again in Beijing. It's a huge operation to bring the show to Beijing — for example, there are more than 4,000 tons of sand in the venue."