

**Pi Artworks London is thrilled to present *Lost Tales and Recovered Histories*, a solo exhibition by Xiaoze Xie, from 14 March - 20 April 2024.**

**PV: 6 - 8 pm  
Thursday 14 March  
55 Eastcastle St  
London W1W 8EG**

*Lost Tales and Recovered Histories* brings together three bodies of work: recent paintings from *The Library Series*, a new sculpture series titled *Amber of History*, and two recent, large-scale installations by Chinese American artist Xiaoze Xie. Through installation, sculpture, painting, and ink drawing, Xie explores the interrelatedness of books, libraries, and historical events, interrogating the vulnerability and deterioration of history and memory.



*Chinese Library No. 75 (Anthonlogy of Su Shi ), 2023, Oil on Canvas*

*The Library Series* is Xie's largest body of work. Begun in 1993 when he was studying painting at The University of North Texas, the series has evolved as Xie has developed as an artist and teacher. When visiting libraries in the U.S. and around the world for research, Xie would photograph the arrangements of books left on the shelves by librarians, his one rule being that he could never reposition them in his paintings. It is the newest works from the series that are on display here: featuring books from the Guimet Museum in Paris, the Library of Congress in Washington D.C, and the Hubei Provincial Library in Wuhan, China, Xie uses a rich palette to give hints of the books' content and emotional resonance, and to evoke the space and atmosphere of the institutions that house them. In Xie's paintings, books, like the ideas within them, are subject to neglect and deterioration. Yet their preservation and continued existence, in however reduced forms, is a testament to their importance and the people who love, and care for them.

*'Black snow fell over Sarajevo,  
darkening the midday sky with ashes  
from the million and a half books burning  
in what was once the national library.'*

*(Memoricide, Phil Cousineau, The Blue Museum, 2004)*

This exhibition also features the inaugural presentation of Xie's installation, *Sarajevo: Ashes of Memory* (2024), the first work in a new series by Xie, which records and commemorates libraries that have been destroyed. On the evening of August 25, 1992, Bosnian Serb Army forces fired rockets and firebombs at the Vijećnica, the city hall complex in Sarajevo that also housed the national library, destroying its holding of nearly 2 million volumes of books and manuscripts.

Xie's installation consists of wooden replicas of letterpress type placed over a large-scale painting of the burnt remains of the National Library of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The painting is presented in the form of an unfurled vertical scroll, also known as *rotulus*, which has been used since antiquity to record legal texts, liturgical manuscripts, and mortuary rolls. It is a form that denotes solemnity and continuity. The letterpress types spell out verses from Phil Cousineau's poem "Memoricide", which tells of the library's destruction from the viewpoint of

its librarian. Ultimately, this work can be read as a warning and a lament. Libraries and books, because of their cultural significance, become key targets of destruction in times of war and conflict

These themes of loss and absence are also present in Xie's other installation work, *Shadow: Paul Pelliot in the Library Cave (2023)*, inspired by the 1908 historical photograph of the French sinologist Paul Pelliot inspecting the troves of manuscript treasures by candlelight in Mogao Cave 17 at Dunhuang. Built during the late Tang Dynasty (851-862 A.D.), Cave 17 (also known as the Library Cave) was once the memorial hall of Dunhuang's chief monk Hong Bian, and contained around 50,000 items including Buddhist sutras, literature, cultural relics, and artworks, before it was sealed. In 1900, the cave was rediscovered, and the majority of artefacts—nearly 40,000 documents, scriptures, and other cultural relics—were successively purchased by European expeditioners like Pelliot. Xie's installation highlights the moment of discovery that had led to the further dispersal of the relics, casting Pelliot himself in shadow while a bright candle flame illuminates the thousands of scrolls—found and preserved—piled one on top of another. Despite their later dispersal, the incontrovertible fact remains that the relics in the Library Cave survived centuries of obscurity and are now preserved for future generations.

For Xie, the Library Cave and Dunhuang have been an important artistic influence for nearly a decade, and his series of resin sculptures *Amber of History*, which includes *Rain of Languages (2023)* and *Splendor of Colors (2023)*, takes the architectural form and physical dimension of the Library Cave as his starting point. The artist centres his imaginative explorations on the dialectical concepts of “plenitude/emptiness” or “gathering/absence” to make works here that figuratively restore the Library Cave's voluminous holdings. In doing so, he analyses civilizational connections, notions of material abundance, and concretizes the idea of “a rain of language”

Ultimately, Xiaoze Xie's project deals with the Library Cave's complex and troubling history of dislocation and loss, as well as preservation and transformation of culture. His wider practice resonates with the ongoing discussions on ethical issues surrounding the acquisition of relics of other countries by Western institutions, and the controversy surrounding repatriation, and discarding of cultural artefacts.

### **Xioze Xie (b. 1966, Guangdong Province, China)**

Xie is an internationally recognized artist and the Paul L. & Phyllis Wattis Professor of Art at Stanford University. He received his MA in Fine art from the Central Academy of Arts & Design in Beijing and the University of North Texas, and has a BA in Engineering in Architecture from Tsinghua University. m, San Jose Museum of Art and Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art. Xie received the 2022 Asia Game Changer West Award from the Asia Society Northern California, the Academic Award in Painting in The Third Nanjing International Art Festival (2016), the Painters and Sculptors Grant from the Joan Mitchell Foundation (2013), the Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant (2003), and artist awards from the Dallas Museum of Art and Phoenix Art Museum.

**Permanent collections include:** The Baltimore Museum of Art, Denver Art Museum, Museum of Fine Arts Houston, Oakland Museum of California, San Francisco Asian Art Museum, San Jose Museum of Art and Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art.

**Show will run from 14 March - 20 April 2024. For further information please contact [london@piartworks.com](mailto:london@piartworks.com) / Whatsapp +44 7718 425153**