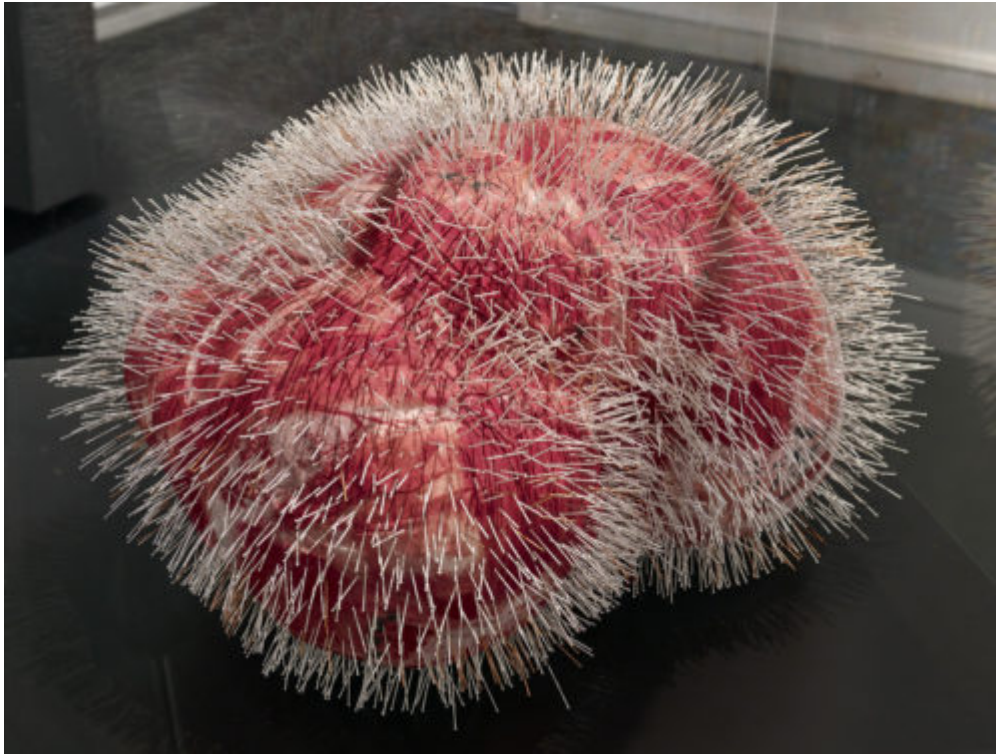
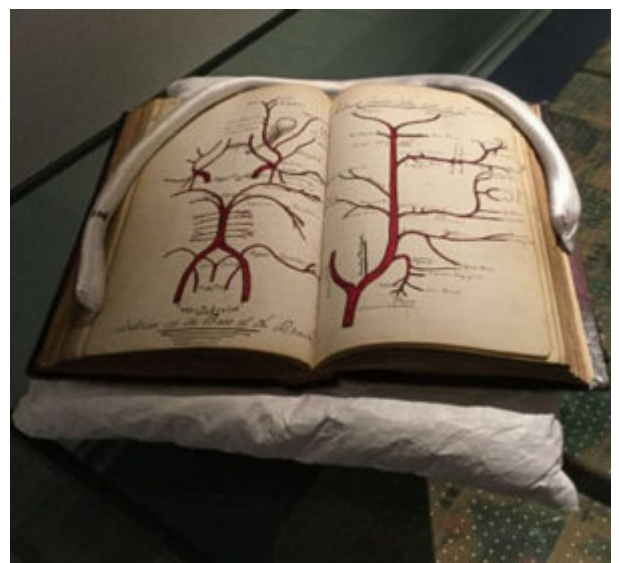


A Quest for Healing: Zhang Yanzi at Surgeons' Hall Museums



In 1881-2 David Middleton Greig created his beautiful *Notes in anatomy taken from lectures by Professor Turner*. A student at Edinburgh University, Greig was just 17 years old when he produced these intricate illustrations, annotated in his own copperplate handwriting. Greig went on to have an illustrious career in medicine, as a war surgeon, a paediatrician and one of the finest anatomists of his time.



On his retirement in 1920 Greig was invited to become Conservator of the Royal College of Surgeons Museum in Edinburgh. Almost one hundred years later, Edinburgh's **Surgeons Hall Museums** (SHM) number Greig's notebook as one of their most prized possessions.

Greig's medical career was firmly based in Western tradition, but in 2017 an artist from a very different culture was inspired by his drawings to create a response to his work. **Professor Zhang Yanzi's** new exhibition ***A Quest for Healing*** opened at SHM this week.



Zhang, who is based in Beijing and has exhibited internationally, began her career in the traditional Chinese arts of calligraphy and landscape, but a childhood memory of playing with her veterinary surgeon father's stethoscope awakened new concerns in

her artistic practice.

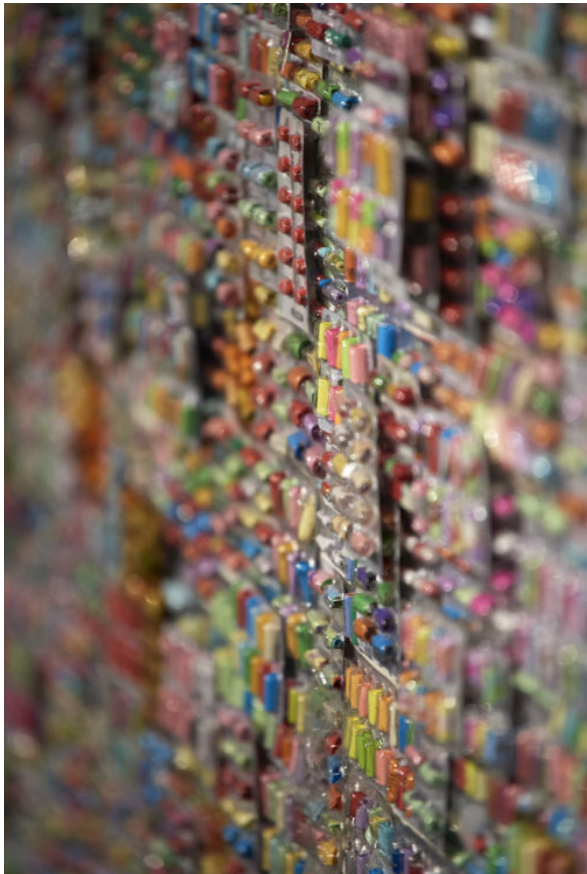
Zhang's more recent artworks stem from her curiosity about our human condition, the body, medicine and healing. In 2017 she was invited to take up a residency at SHM; its vast collections, she says, almost overwhelmed her. Noticing that the Museums had little information about Eastern medicine, she sought to incorporate the ancient Chinese concepts of qi, acupuncture and herbalism in her response to what she saw.

For the Chinese, *qi* is our life energy. It flows through *meridians*, along which are situated certain acupuncture points. If meridians can be seen as channels of communication within the body, Zhang's first piece *Qi* (right - image: John-McKenzie and Galerie Ora-Ora) draws parallels between this concept and the Beijing-Hangzhou (or Grand) Canal.



This beautiful scroll painting was originally created for the **2013 Venice Biennale**. Hanging in the Museums' Playfair Gallery, it is decorated with fine calligraphy and ink drawings of Chinese landscapes – but instead of simply being rolled out, the scroll is arranged in a zig-zag shape. The canal, explains Henrietta Tsui-Leung of Galerie Ora-Ora, Hong Kong, was built long before the unification of China (the first part was started around 1800 BC), to join centres of power and to bring supplies to Beijing and to the kingdom. Inevitably, such communication also led to cultural interchange. Similarly, the body contains not only the blood vessels so carefully delineated by David Middleton Greig, but also the invisible meridian systems;

'I think the things we can't see sometimes offer a better and stronger energy....When illnesses cannot be cured by Western medicine, people may turn to Chinese herbalism and acupuncture. Chinese medicine is a great mystery.' (*Zhang Yanzi*)



In the main exhibition room, Zhang's stunning installation *Wishing Capsules* (left – image: John-McKenzie and Galerie Ora-Ora) is a vibrant, multi-coloured triangle of thousands of medicine capsules. The triangle references the mountains of traditional landscape painting, the permanence of the natural world as a backdrop to our transient human concerns.

Each capsule contains a note of the wishes and dreams of a Chinese schoolchild or a friend of the artist. The piece is, suggests Chris Henry, SHM Director of Heritage, akin to a visitors' book, and indeed Zhang's title plays on the concept of *capsule* as container of both medication and message. In Chinese philosophy everything is connected;

'Ancient Chinese people believed that everything mutually supports and restrains each other...from the body to the spirit, we always have moments of confusion and look for remedy. Whilst men were born to suffer pain, affliction of the soul needs consolation of the spirit and the strength and calmness from the inner mind and body' (*Zhang Yanzi*)

Secret Path (right – image: John-McKenzie and Galerie Ora-Ora) is a series of four artworks, each showing a face superimposed onto a landscape ink painting. The faces are drawn from a Song Dynasty book on face reading (the idea that patterns of facial



moles give clues to a person's character or destiny) while the red trees in the landscapes beneath resemble the arteries in David Middleton Greig's *Notes in Anatomy*. Again Zhang references the many ways in which illness can be interpreted and healing begun.

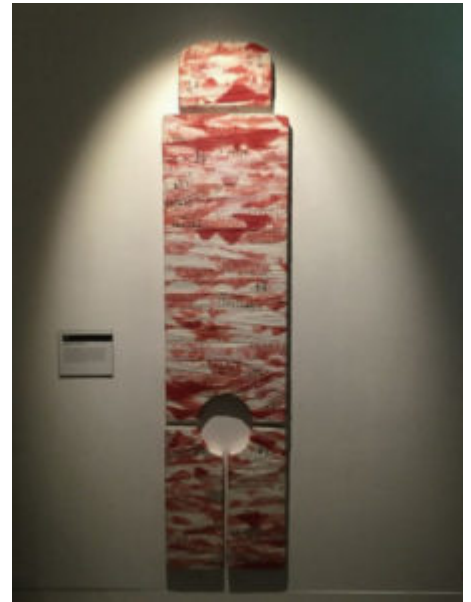


In the centre of the room a glass case contains *All Volcanoes are Nothing but Acne* (top – image: John-McKenzie and Galerie Ora-Ora); this strange, bulbous shape is made of cotton, gauze and acupuncture needles. Is it a child in the womb? A spot? A volcano? Human tissue? Distance changes meaning and perspective. Similarly, in *Limitless* (left – image: John-McKenzie and Galerie Ora-Ora), twelve panels of ink on paper, we see hundreds of tiny ants

scattering across the canvas. Zhang investigates the meaning of our human lives, our role in the wider context of the universe;

'When contemplating the world at a distance, human life seems on a par with that of ants and even mustard seeds...we are but small sparks amidst a vast universe with limitless stars.'

Scar (right) and *Sanctuary* are replicas of two surgical beds in use in Hong Kong until the 1960s. Hong Kong's Old Pathological Institute was at the forefront of the fight against bubonic plague, which afflicted the area until the 1920s. *Scar* is shown upright, swathed in medical bandages dyed with blood red cinnabar and inscribed with Zhang's landscape paintings, poetry and calming thoughts. *Sanctuary* is covered in analgesic plasters and images of



healing plants from the garden of the Hong Kong Museum of Medical Sciences, where both pieces were first shown. Both are reminiscent, perhaps, of Julie Roberts' paintings of gynaecological couches, both artists asking us to consider

the unseen occupants of the beds, their suffering, and the many places in which healing may be found.

Whilst Zhang Yanzi's work encourages us to think deeply about the nature of illness, *A Quest for Healing* is above all an exhibition about mystery, healing and hope.

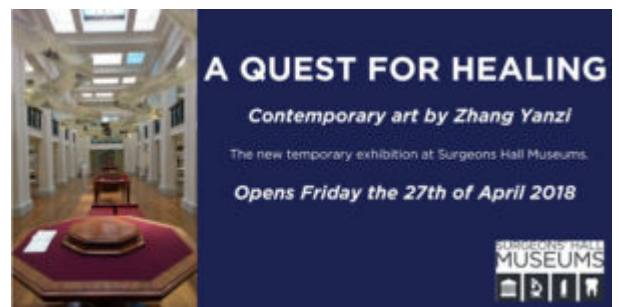
A Quest for Healing is at [Surgeons' Hall Museums](#), The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, Nicolson Street, until 4 November 2018. The Museums are open every day 10am-5pm; please note that the minimum recommended age for admission is 10, and all children under 16 must be accompanied by an adult. Admission charges apply.



A partner exhibition, *A Quest for Wellness*, will open at the Museum of East Asian Art in Bath from 5 May.

Professor Zhang Yanzi is a gallery artist of Hong Kong's [Galerie Ora-Ora](#), a research-based Asian contemporary fine art gallery founded by Henrietta Tsui-Leung and Alfred Leung in 2006.

With thanks to Chris Hendry (SHM), Henrietta Tsui Leung and Nick Stephens (Galerie Ora-Ora) and Alice Barnett (Sutton PR).



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