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The Reviving Project

By Noor Sami

When Yushan Cassie Sun arrived in America in 2012, she already had big hopes for the future. A craft and material study major with a concentration in jewelry and metalsmithing, Cassie will graduate this May with some wonderful research experiences under her belt. The summer before she came to VCU, Cassie spent time learning the techniques of three craftsmen in China. As she lived and learned with them, she realized that although her learning was valuable, there were hundreds of other endangered craft techniques in China that she was not learning—and that's what got her interested in what would later become the Reviving Project.



PanXiu embroidered clothing created by the Reviving Project

that they would continue with the project whether they got the funding or not. From here Cassie moved to connect with about fifteen artists to create crafts such as jewelry and clothing in the PanXiu style; their goal was not to change the original art, but to recreate it to promote the technique.



PanXiu embroidered clothing created by the Reviving Project

interacting with connections in China while being so far away, as well as struggling with the schedules of the American artists, some of whom are professionals.

Despite challenges, Cassie is fully invested in her project. She recalls one of her proudest moments; when she went to China for the Beijing show, she returned to visit a craftswoman with whom she stayed during the summer of 2012 to show her the catalogues of work her team of artists has created. Cassie felt as if she were finally able to repay her for her teaching and hospitality.

The Reviving Project is an international art show that happens both in Richmond, Virginia and Beijing, China. It showcases the heritage craft called PanXiu, a type of embroidery that uses two needles, unique to the Tu minority in Qinghai, China. PanXiu is in danger of dying out, as it brings in little money and consequently, craftsmen have stopped teaching it to their children. Cassie began the project by connecting with her mentor, Kristin Caskey, and applying to three grants. Though they received all three, they had already decided

Cassie and her team work with the Bureau of Culture in Huzhu, China in order to connect with Tu craftsmen. Forty percent of the income made from the art shows goes to the Bureau and the Tu craftsmen. Both shows took place in the summer of 2015; the Richmond show ran from June 26 and July 9, while the Beijing show went from July 29 to August 1. Cassie faced a great deal of pressure organizing the shows and traveling from Richmond to Beijing to set them up. In creating this project, she dealt with the difficulty of interacting with connections in China while being so far away, as well as struggling with the schedules of the American artists, some of whom are professionals.

“I want people to be aware of disappearing crafts and cultures,” Cassie says. That’s why she’s doing this project. The craftswoman she lived with had to share a bed with her; she had no bathroom in her home and worked for one dollar a day. Heritage crafts are disappearing because of urbanization and industrialization; cheap, factory-made clothing replaces handmade crafts and craftsmen no longer teach their children their crafts, sending them to university instead. Of course, the Chinese government and Bureau of Culture try their best to keep these crafts alive, but it isn’t enough. The audience of this artwork needs to take action. Cassie recognizes that she can’t save all the endangered art techniques, but as an artist she feels it is her responsibility to save as much as she can.

More than anything, her project needs more exposure and more funds. A larger team of artists would benefit the project, and Cassie herself believes she needs more experience as an artist to further her goals. In the future, she hopes to put on more shows, shooting for the summer of 2017. She would love to expand the project to include more disappearing crafts in China, as well as perhaps one day promoting cultural art from other countries. Most importantly, Cassie hopes to be ethical with reviving cultural techniques through promoting artwork the way the original artists want it to be promoted.

You can find out more about Cassie’s project at www.revivingproject.com.