



The Cathedral
Church of **Saint John**
the Divine

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PRESS RELEASE

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PHOENIX: Xu Bing at the Cathedral

New York, NY, January, 2013 — The Cathedral of St. John the Divine announced today that *Phoenix*, two monumental sculptures by celebrated Chinese artist Xu Bing, will be installed in its Nave. The opening, which will include a festival for New Yorkers and visitors, will take place on Saturday, March 1, 2014.

Xu Bing, described by the *New York Times* as “one of China’s most original artists,” spent two years working on *Phoenix*. Constructed of workers’ tools and debris gathered from demolition sites across the ever-changing landscape of Beijing, the two majestic birds, *Feng* and *Huang*, which together weigh over 12 tons and measure 90 and 100 feet, respectively, will be suspended from the Cathedral’s ceiling.

“Xu Bing’s art is animated by his life-long pursuit of a transnational language with which we can communicate more deeply with each other, across cultures and time,” said the Very Reverend Dr. James A. Kowalski, Dean of the Cathedral. “We’re proud to place the work of this global citizen under the roof of this Cathedral as we continue our tradition of conversations between our diverse communities.”

The sculptures, at once fierce and antic, combine the wildness of pre-historic beasts with the unfettered imagination of a child’s creation; together they address the radical economic changes that have transformed contemporary China.

“The phoenix of today’s China bears countless scars,” said Xu Bing. “It has lived through great hardship. But it has also adorned itself with great self-respect.”

The installation of *Phoenix* at the Cathedral will be epic in scale. Arriving in sections on 9 escorted flat-bed trucks, the works will be brought through the Cathedral’s Great Bronze Doors. Once the sculptures are in position, over 30 hoists and 140 feet of truss will be used to raise *Phoenix* above the floor of the Cathedral. Once suspended, the sculptures will fill the Nave; when lit, they will appear like constellations in the sky. During the installation process, which began on January 6, Cathedral visitors can watch the work take form.

The making of *Phoenix* was a long and complex process. A crew of migrant laborers worked with the artist in a factory in a suburb on the outskirts of Beijing. “The method,” the artist explains, “is



The Cathedral
Church of **Saint John**
the Divine

Page 2 cont.

unsophisticated, like Chinese lanterns. At the same time, it is also in keeping with the Western concept of ready-made assemblage. The entire process of creation forms an interactive relationship with the environment and Chinese society. The construction site, the working conditions of the migrant laborers and their contrast with the modern high-rises stimulated me deeply, that all along the high-tech structures were the result of such low-tech methods. These things inspired me, and made me realize that the materials and atmosphere at the site were their own powerful language.”

Judith Goldman, guest curator of the exhibition, has had a long career in the arts. Formerly a curator of prints at the Whitney Museum of American Art and managing editor of *ARTnews*, Ms. Goldman brings her passion and experience to this complex undertaking. The Phoenix sculptures are on loan from the Taiwanese collector Barry Lam.

The Cathedral is grateful to the Studio of Xu Bing, Jesse Coffino and Xu Hong for their dedication and commitment to this extraordinary project.

About the Artist

Xu Bing was born in 1955 in Chongqing, China. In 1977, he entered the printmaking department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing (CAFA), where he completed his bachelor's degree in 1981, stayed on as an instructor and earned his MFA in 1987. In 1990, on the invitation of the University of Wisconsin-Madison, he first came to the United States. Today, Xu Bing lives and works in New York and Beijing.

Exhibitions of his work have been held at numerous museums, including the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Ashmolean Museum of Art at the University of Oxford; the British Museum, London; the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco; the Reina Sofia, Madrid; and the New Museum, New York. Xu Bing's work is presently featured in *Ink Art* at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, and a major exhibition, *Xu Bing: A Retrospective*, will open later this month at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum, Taiwan.

Xu Bing received a MacArthur Fellowship in 1999. He was awarded the Fukuoka Asian Culture Prize in 2002, and in 2004 he received the first Wales International Visual Art Prize, Artes Mundi. In 2008, he was appointed Vice President of his alma mater, Beijing's Central Academy of Fine Arts. Columbia University presented him with a Doctor of Humane Letters in 2010.

About the Cathedral

The Cathedral of St. John the Divine is the Cathedral of the Episcopal Diocese of New York. It is chartered as a house of prayer for all people and a unifying center of intellectual light and leadership. People from many faiths and communities worship together in services held more than 30 times a week; the soup kitchen serves roughly 25,000 meals annually; social service outreach has an increasingly varied roster of programs; the distinguished Cathedral School prepares young students to be future leaders; Adults and Children in Trust, the renowned preschool, afterschool and summer program, offers



The Cathedral
Church of **Saint John**
the Divine

Page 3 cont.

diverse educational and nurturing experiences; the outstanding Textile Conservation Lab preserves world treasures; concerts, exhibitions, performances and civic gatherings allow conversation, celebration, reflection and remembrance—such is the joyfully busy life of this beloved and venerated Cathedral.

Since the rededication of the Nave in 2008, following seven years of restoration after a severe fire in 2001, the Cathedral has mounted a number of critically acclaimed exhibitions devoted to contemporary art. Among these, *The Value of Water* brought together the work of 41 artists; *Voices from Japan: Despair and Hope from Disaster* spoke to lasting turmoil in the wake of the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami; and *Jane Alexander: Surveys (from the Cape of Good Hope)*, organized with the Museum of African Art, presented the artist's chimeric installations in new, groundbreaking environments.

General Information

The Cathedral of St. John the Divine is located at 1047 Amsterdam Avenue (at 112th Street), Manhattan.

The Cathedral is open 7 days a week from 7:30 AM – 6:00 PM. There is a suggested admission of \$10.00 per person. Please visit stjohndivine.org for more information and a schedule of public programs.