

GROUND LEVEL

Lines in the sand tell dramatic stories

Artist performs and makes dazzling videos for leading companies

By **CHENG HONG** in Taiyuan, Shanxi
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Artist Wang Xin has turned her back on traditional tools and materials such as pencils, charcoal and paintbrushes to create stunning images using an unusual medium — sand.

She uses her skills in stage performances, and has worked for some of the country's top companies.

Wang started to draw at the age of 5, but her fascination with sand began much later when, in 2008, she was studying graphic design in Ireland.

"One day, I was enchanted by a street artist who was making sand sculptures," said Wang, 31, a graduate of the Beijing Institute of Graphic Communication. "I joined him to play with the sand."

"It was so interesting to watch him spread sand on the ground and model it into cute shapes such as a puppy or a bear."

Wang started using sand to produce pictures when she returned to China in 2010.

"It's better for a beginner to try his hand at sand drawing instead of sand sculpting, because drawing does not need much space and sand," she said.

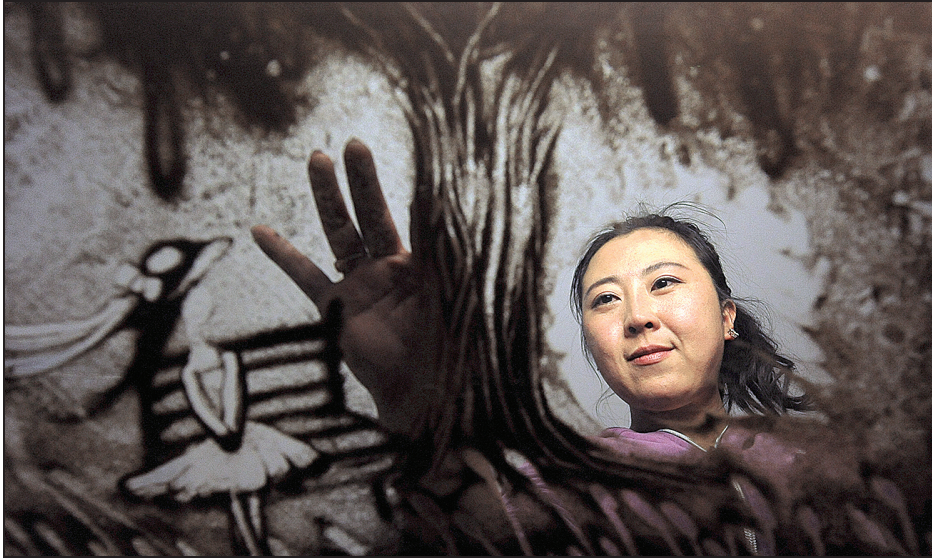
Wang collected sand from riverbanks, and she used frosted glass and light tubes to produce a light table on which to work.

Initially, she used various items such as steel wire and tree branches to create pictures, before moving on to using her hands.

"It seems easy, but it requires a lot of effort to let your hands 'know' the sand and control it well," she said.

Wang realized that sand drawing could be used in stage performances after watching a video of Kseniya Simonova, who became an online sensation in 2009 by telling a story set during World War II through a series of sand drawings displayed on a screen.

Wang studied many online videos of sand drawing performances, noting the types of equipment and the techniques used to create dramatic effects.



Sand artist Wang Xin practices drawing in her studio in Taiyuan, Shanxi province. YIN HAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

"Both the traditional way of drawing and sand drawing require inspiration and solid basic skills, but what is lovely about sand drawing is its continuity," Wang said.

"For example, in one picture I use sand to create a girl, and the girl's eyes smoothly turn into the sun in the next picture."

"The pictures are not separate. Sand drawing is constantly in flux, and that makes for powerful storytelling."

Wang said she loves the infinite possibilities that sand drawing offers.

"An accident can become a cute improvisation. Once the woolen ball on my hat fell off onto the sand on the light table, leaving a mark resembling a dandelion. The mark was a brilliant embellishment for the picture."

"Sand is full of emotions. It can be cheerful, sad, quiet and excited. The sand painter's actions can bring out the emotions. Sometimes you blow the sand gently, and the picture shows a different emotion."

In 2011, Wang set up a sand drawing studio, and she promoted her business by giving a USB drive containing examples of her work to wedding planners and advertising agencies.

Quick Bio

Name: Wang Xin
Age: 31
Hometown: Taiyuan, Shanxi province
Education: University degree
Job: Sand artist
Income: 10,000 yuan (\$1,600) per month on average
Hobbies: Hiking, photography



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Wang Xin, sand artist

She performed at a friend's wedding banquet, and the audience was amazed by the way she manipulated the sand.

Friends introduced Wang to others, and gradually she made her name. She has appeared at hundreds of events ranging from banquets to news conferences, and has performed and made videos for leading companies such as the Dalian Wanda Group and China Mobile.

"When I am given a task, I make sketches and select music that suits the content," Wang said. "The design process usually takes more than a week, and once it is finalized I practice for two days before presenting the piece on stage."

Wang has contacted sand artists and visited studios across the country to improve her skills, exchange ideas and learn from their experience.

Sand drawing is not very well known, and Wang hopes to raise its profile by taking part in charitable activities.

"Inspiring more people through this art form will be a major focus of my work in the future," she said.

Sun Li contributed to this story.

Around China

LIAONING Police stop driver in stolen uniform

A driver wearing a stolen police uniform who had an emergency light on his car remained calm when he was stopped by the real police, turning to them and saying, "hello." When he was caught by traffic police in Shenyang on Monday, the man, surnamed Yan, admitted stealing the uniform. It is illegal to fit a police emergency light to a private car. He was fined 7,000 yuan (\$1,100) and detained for 15 days. Yan, 30, was released from prison at the end of 2013 after being convicted of fraud.

SHENYANG EVENING NEWS

ZHENGJIANG Mother kowtows to avoid paying charge

A woman performed the traditional act of prostration known as kowtowing in the hope that she would be let off from a parking charge. The woman, surnamed Ding, took her sick son to a hospital in Jiangbei on Dec 27 and left her car in a parking lot. When she returned to collect the vehicle on Monday, she was told she would have to pay a charge of 805 yuan (\$130). "I had only 90 yuan in my pocket, and kowtowed as I could not pay," she said. The attendant agreed to accept the 90 yuan and let her leave.

QIANJIANG EVENING NEWS

JIANGSU Bank truck driver flees with gold

The driver of a security truck was sentenced to 13 years in prison after he sped off with gold, silver and bank notes worth more than 2 million yuan (\$322,000). The 39-year-old, surnamed Wang, was part of a team delivering the

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consignment to a bank in Xuzhou in May 2014. He drove off with the haul as his colleagues were completing the handover procedures. Before he was caught, Wang used some of the money to pay off debts of 830,000 yuan. He was fined 50,000 yuan.

MODERN EXPRESS

HUNAN Genetic problem causes anguish

A woman who has a similar genetic makeup to her husband has suffered six miscarriages in the past three years. Doctors said the genetic problem had caused the woman's body to reject the fetuses.

MODERN EXPRESS

HUNAN Student with 1 yuan travels 20,000 km

A student who went traveling for a year with just 1 yuan (\$0.16) in his pocket in July 2014 has so far visited 40 cities and covered more than 20,000 km. Hou Qunfeng is earning money along the way by giving talks about his travels, and said he is grateful to the many strangers who have helped him.

MODERN EXPRESS

GUANGDONG Bank note wakes up man in coma

A man who had been in a coma for more than a year woke up when a 100 yuan (\$16) bank note was waved in front of him. Xiao Li fell into a coma in Shenzhen in August 2013. But when a nurse took out a 100 yuan note from her pocket and waved it, he held up a hand to grab it. Though it took him five minutes to reach the note, doctors said the movement shows he has regained consciousness. However, they said it may take him some time to recover sufficiently to be discharged.

SOUTHERN METROPOLIS DAILY

Chengdu special

Visa office considered for NZ consulate in Chengdu

By **HUANG ZHILING**
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A delegation of journalists from Chengdu, capital of Sichuan province, visited Hamilton, New Zealand from Dec 15 to 17.

They interviewed Hamilton Mayor Julie Hardaker, New Zealand National Agricultural Fielddays CEO Jon Calder and Waikato Institute of Technology President Mark Flowers, covering a range of exchanges between the cities in agriculture, education, science and technology.

It marked increasing exchanges between Chengdu and New Zealand in the wake of the establishment of the New Zealand consulate general in Chengdu.

Alistair Crozier, the first head of the New Zealand consulate general in Chengdu, announced on Dec 11 a visa application center could be set up at the office next year.

His remarks pleased local residents like Zhou Lin, a middle-aged college teacher who has never been to the Southern Hemisphere.

"Friends whose children study in New Zealand keep telling me it is one of the best places in the world to live. I do want to go there," the travel enthusiast said.

New Zealand Prime Minister John Key opened the new consulate on Nov 12 during his first visit to Sichuan province.

It is New Zealand's fourth consulate in China following Shanghai, Guangzhou and Hong Kong. Its consular district includes Southwest China's Guizhou and Yunnan provinces and Chongqing municipality.

The new Chengdu post means New Zealand now has more diplomatic missions in China than in any other country.

"New Zealand is among the first group of countries in the world to open a diplomatic post in Chengdu. This is a natural continuation of our expanding and increasingly close relationship with China," the prime minister said.



New Zealand Prime Minister John Key opened the new consulate on Nov 12 during a visit to Sichuan province.

HUANG SHANGWEN / FOR CHINA DAILY

"China is now our largest export market as well as our largest source of imports. Two-way trade with China exceeded \$20 billion in May this year, ahead of the 2015 target. Earlier this year, President Xi Jinping and I agreed to set a new and more ambitious annual target of \$30 billion by 2020," he said.

The prime minister expressed his wish of deepening understanding between the island country and the province and welcomed more Sichuan people to visit.

New Zealand will continue to cooperate with Sichuan in aviation, agriculture, food and beverage and environmental technology, he said.

Right before inauguration of the New Zealand consulate general, the

permanent site of the Australian consulate general in Chengdu was unveiled on Nov 9. It follows the Australian consulate general established in Guangzhou in 1992.

Twelve foreign consular posts have now opened in Chengdu, more than any other city in Central and West China.

West China powerhouse

As an exceptionally large city in the region, Chengdu is at the forefront of West China reforms and opening up.

It is located at the intersection of the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, two of the country's key national strategies formulated by President

Xi Jinping after the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012.

As reported in the Chinese media, the "One Belt and One Road" initiatives will reach 4.4 billion people, 63 percent, or almost two-thirds of the world's population, with a collective GDP of \$21 trillion, or 29 percent of the world's GDP.

In October, the Tianfu New Area in Sichuan was promoted to a State-level new zone and became the third such zone in Southwest China. It brings the number of State new zones in West China from four to five.

The Tianfu New Area will change the single-center pattern of cities on the Chengdu Plain which has

lasted thousands of years. It will be a driving force behind development of high-end industries in Sichuan, said local officials.

Chengdu is a huge market itself with a population of 17 million. With its influence in neighboring areas, businesses in the city can reach a market of 250 million people.

"By 2013, a total of 26 New Zealand firms had invested more than \$63 million in Sichuan," said Sichuan Governor Wei Hong during the opening ceremony for the New Zealand consulate general in Chengdu.

Crozier is optimistic the number will rise and promised to further introduce Sichuan to New Zealand firms and attract investment in West China during his term as the consul general.

In 2010, the Australia and New Zealand Bank (China) Co Ltd was established, making ANZ the first Australian bank to be locally incorporated in the country. In the following year, it opened an operations hub in Chengdu to support its growth in the Asian-Pacific region. In May, an ANZ Chengdu branch opened.

A Fortune 500 firm, ANZ set up a branch in Chengdu because it knows the city has big potential for investment, said an official with the Chengdu Financial Office.

While preparations for the ANZ Chengdu branch were underway, Australia set up its consulate general in Chengdu on July 30, 2013. By then, more than 100 Australian firms had already invested in Sichuan.

"Before I arrived in Chengdu, I talked with Australian government officials and businessmen. I was surprised that most of the conversations ended with 'see you in Chengdu,'" said Nancy Gordon, the first Australian consul general in Chengdu.

An increasing number of Australians want to establish business ties in Chengdu in construction, financial services, logistics, manufacturing, food and wine, tourism, education and film, she said.



In February 2013, the direct flight between Chengdu and Melbourne opened, being West China's first direct flight to Melbourne. People in West China no longer have to fly to Australia through Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. Chengdu has opened 78 international air routes, ranking first in Central and West China.

In September 2013, Chengdu started the 72-hour visa-free policy, becoming the fourth domestic city to implement the policy after Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou. The policy boosted exchanges between Chengdu and other parts of the world.

In August 2014, Chengdu and Hamilton, New Zealand became sister cities, bringing the number of its foreign sister cities to 24.

Exchanges between Chengdu and Hamilton started in the mid-1990s. Both cities are working to bring the New Zealand National Agricultural Fielddays, the largest agricultural fair in the Southern Hemisphere, to Chengdu.

From Dec 11 to 14, Lan Wo, a well-known agricultural operation in New Zealand and a Fortune 500 firm, took its patented products — a paddy caulk and plant cell repair agent — to the Chengdu International Urban Modern Agricultural Expo.

In March, Tom Tate, mayor of the city of Gold Coast in Australia, came to Chengdu to negotiate agreements on cooperation in air routes, education and culture. On Oct 21, he returned to sign a letter of intent for establishing sister city ties.