



NOME

CUT SLEEVE, SPLIT PEACH
XIYADIE

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X I Y A D I E

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N O M E P R O J E C T . C O M

STATEMENT

Even now, he couldn't tell me the full story. Among the limbs of an apple tree orchard in a northern Chinese village, Xiyadie fell in love with his male classmate. Xiyadie means Siberian Butterfly, a name he chose after his move to Beijing in the 1990s as a migrant worker. *Cut Sleeve, Split Peach* shows a selection of his works, traditional paper-cuts free snipped and hand dyed. An entanglement of forms, he lacerates duos and trios of lovers caught in the reaching tendrils of lush gardens. As a personal testament to his own coming out, the splitting of blank sheets holds secrets only Xiyadie can tell. As Siberian Butterfly, he flits between spaces, crafting a queer proposal for other worlds that are already possible.

The passion of the cut sleeve and split peach began in pre-dynastic China, when Mizi Xia tasted a peach so sweet, he had to share it with the Duke Ling of Wei. Later, in the Han Dynasty, Emperor Ai's lover Dong Xian fell asleep on his sleeve. He could not bear to wake him. Instead, he cut through the silk fabric. In the search beyond the pleasures of this moment, queer desire disrupts normal patterns of love that govern the social order. Informed by Chinese-specific processes of modernization following the Cultural Revolution, queerness in this region today is mapped more according to the structural formation of power rather than through the intersections of social identity. As theorist Petrus Liu suggests, "to raise the question of queer desire in this context is also to examine the incomplete project of decolonization in Asia, the achievements and failures of socialist democracy, the contradictory process of capitalist modernization, and the uneven exchange of capital and goods."

The Siberian Butterfly is a northern creature. It survives in the harshest conditions, maintaining its vanity

and pursuit of freedom. Xiyadie's mother was a paper-cut artist but he became a farmer. He married a woman and had two children, the elder born with cerebral palsy and requiring constant attention. Xiyadie came out to his wife, yet remains married. Before their children grew up, he would send money back to his hometown every month to support them. In *Gate* (2016), two figures make love outside an entryway. A woman takes care of a child inside. The violence of rupture, in the pursuit of free love, falls on all the figures in the frame. Romance between men is naturalized through the transformation of vines and flowers into fluid streams. Everywhere, Xiyadie sees other butterflies.

Paper-cutting was first introduced in the ancient worship of ancestors and gods. Hung on the panes of windows and doors as symbols of luck and happiness, paper-cuts filter dancing shadows into the home. Archaeological records show this folk art originating in the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220 CE), though many believe they date to the Warring States period, around 3 BCE. "Sometimes I imagine cutting the vault of the night's black sky into a flaming sun. Sometimes people like to fight with nature. Sometimes you have to work with it," the artist commented on working in this medium in a 2012 profile with *Advocate*.

Homosexuality was decriminalized in 1997 and removed from the country's list of mental illnesses in 2001. But, queer life remains largely unaccepted under strict family structures and in social life. Many move to city centres to find their communities. Xiyadie sought out a doctor when he moved to Beijing, asking him to cure him of male desire. The diagnosis came back clean. He was instead directed towards community groups. Soon after, Xiyadie's first exhibition was held at the Beijing LGBT Center. In *Gate (Tiananmen)* (2016), male lovers intertwine between the open Gates of Heavenly Peace— an illicit

love at the main site where the legal love of the nation is performed. A version of China's Open Door Policy, Xiyadie's lovers embrace. "It was in this square that Mao Zedong declared the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, and it is here that generations have protested: in 1919 during the May Fourth Movement, in 1976 after the death of Zhou Enlai, in 1989 when thousands were murdered in the Tiananmen Square Massacre. Now, mass gatherings take the form of military parades.

Resistant to the structures of Chinese state policy, Xiyadie falls only half in love with his surroundings. His deeply personal and romantic stories exist in chambers that are always between opening and closing doors. The repetition of forms and the flourishing of unruly garden landscapes is marked by perceived ruptures in the establishment of the People's Republic of China. Turning towards the everyday, the fantasy of his paper-cuts follow his own experiences. His life and works refuse the grammar of the grand narrative of nation-building, forming instead an aesthetic possibility for rearrangement of the social order in an East Asian context. Everytime Xiyadie makes a cut, it is as if he is writing his name for the first time.

Hera Chan

A R T W O R K S

JOY 乐, 1999

Xiyadie

Papercut with water-based dye and Chinese pigments on Xuan paper
27cm x 27cm



JOY 乐, 1999

Xiyadie
Papercut with water-based dye and Chinese pigments on Xuan paper
27cm x 27cm



HEAVEN AND EARTH 天地, 2000

Xiyadie
papercut with water-based dye and Chinese pigments on Xuan paper
27cm x 27cm



CAVE 洞, 2001

Xiyadie
Papercut with water-based dye and Chinese pigments on Xuan paper
27cm x 27cm



PRISONER 囚, 1999

Xiyadie
Papercut on Xuan paper
27cm x 27cm



CAVE 洞, 2003

Xiyadie
Papercut with water-based dye and Chinese pigments on Xuan
paper 27cm x 27cm



CAVE 洞, 2003

Xiyadie
Papercut with water-based dye and Chinese pigments on Xuan paper
27cm x 27cm



JOY 乐, 2005

Xiyadie
Papercut with water-based dye and Chinese pigments on Xuan paper
27cm x 27cm



BUTTERFLY 蝶, 2006

Xiyadie
Papercut with water-based dye and Chinese pigments on Xuan paper
27cm x 27cm



BUTTERFLY 蝶, 2006

Xiyadie
Papercut on Xuan paper
27cm x 27cm



JOY 乐, 2016

Xiyadie
Papercut with water-based dye and Chinese pigments on Xuan paper
27cm x 27cm



GATE (TIANANMEN) 门 (天安门), 2016

Xiyadie
Papercut with water-based dye and Chinese pigments on Xuan paper
140cm x 140cm



SEWN 缝, 1999

Xiyadie
Papercut with water-based dye and Chinese pigments on Xuan paper
140cm x 140cm



GATE [门], 1992

Xiyadie
Papercut with water-based dye and Chinese pigments on Xuan paper
140cm x 140cm



JOY 乐, 1999

Xiyadie

Papercut with water-based dye and Chinese pigments on Xuan paper
140cm x 140cm



GATE [门], 1999

Xiyadie

Papercut with water-based dye and Chinese pigments on Xuan paper
140cm x 140cm



WALL 墙, 2016

Xiyadie
Papercut with water-based dye and Chinese pigments on Xuan paper
140cm x 140cm



GATE 17, 1992

Xiyadie
Papercut with water-based dye and Chinese pigments on Xuan paper
140cm x 140cm



FLOWERPOT 盆, 1991

Xiyadie
Papercut with water-based dye and Chinese pigments on Xuan paper
140cm x 140cm



JOY 乐, 1999

Xiyadie

Papercut with water-based dye and Chinese pigments on Xuan paper
140cm x 140cm



CAR (TRAIN) 车 (火车), 1985

Xiyadie

Papercut with water-based dye and Chinese pigments on Xuan paper
140cm x 140cm



XIYADIE

西亚蝶

Xiyadie, born 1963 in Heyang County, Shaanxi Province, China, is a self-taught traditional Chinese papercut artist who started creating works with homoerotic themes to tell his narrative of transformation. Xiyadie means Siberian Butterfly, a name he chose after his move to Beijing as a migrant worker in the early 2000s, where he found an accepting community in the burgeoning gay subcultural scene. As he relates, the Siberian Butterfly is a northern creature. Surviving in the harshest conditions, it maintains its vanity and pursuit of freedom in an environment that does not lend political agency or representation to queer-identifying people.

In the late 1980s, his native Shaanxi Province was a centre for the preservation of folk arts including papercutting, which originates in the Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220 CE). Xiyadie subverts this historical form by depicting scenes of queer eroticism, where human beings are fused with nature and gay virility combines with the fertility of gardens and animal life. Due to the thinness of Chinese rice paper traditionally used for this craft, each work is made in editions, though the artist also works with materials like newspaper and silk, intricately cut and dyed by hand.

Xiyadie was educated at the Special Arts and Crafts School in Heyang County, and worked in the crafts department of the Xi'an Film Studio. His works were first exhibited at the Beijing LGBT Center. He was a participating artist in *Spectrosynthesis: Asian LGBTQ Issues and Art Now* (2017) at Taipei MOCA, marking the largest exhibition of its kind in Asia. His works have also been shown at Para Site, Hong Kong (2017); Galerie Verbeeck — Van Dyck, Antwerp (2015); Topenmuseum, Amsterdam (2015); Museum of World Culture, Gothenburg (2013); Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities, Stockholm (2012); and Flazh!Alley Art Studio, San Pedro, USA (2012). Xiyadie has been profiled by *Hyperallergic*, *BBC News*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Global Times*, *Shaanxi TV*, *Dragon TV*, *CCTV*, *et alors?* and *Advocate*. He is a member of the *China Society for the Study of Folk Literature and Art*, as well as the *Shaanxi Society for the Study of Folk Literature and Art*.

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