

Start at home

Floral figure



‘I have always been amazed at the shape of the human body and how it has formed the centrepiece of art for thousands of years.’

– Ah Xian

About the artist

Growing up in China in the 1960s and 70s, young Liu Ji Xian loved art. However, art schools across the country were closed due to the Cultural Revolution, so he taught himself how to paint. By his twenties he was an established artist, going by the name Ah Xian. In 1990, seeking political asylum, he moved to Australia.

About the work

Ah Xian began creating ornately decorated life-sized figures in the late 1990s. The materials he uses are rich in Chinese cultural significance: jade, porcelain, red lacquer and ox-bone, to name a few. The flowers covering this tranquil bust were made with cloisonné, a metalwork technique popular during the Ming Dynasty. Many of Ah Xian’s figures are modelled on his friends and family members.

Human human - cloisonné bust 3 is currently on display in Gallery 6

image Ah Xian, China/Australia, born 1960, Jingdong Cloisonné Factory, manufacturer, China, Human human - cloisonné bust 3, 2001, Dachang County, Hebei Province, cloisonné enamel on copper, 45.0 x 42.5 x 25.5 cm; Gift of ETSA Utilities and the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 2006, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, © courtesy the artist.

Presented by





Materials you need

- a friend or family member to model for you
- 2 or 3 different flowers, picked from your garden or neighbourhood
- a piece of paper (A3 or larger)
- a lead pencil
- textas
- coloured pencils
- an eraser

Take it further

Try out a different technique to fill a figure outline – perhaps use collage or watercolour.

Ah Xian uses other motifs, besides flowers, that are significant to his cultural heritage. Think of an image or symbol that is special or meaningful to you and create a new figure drawing filled with that pattern.

Use acrylic paint to cover an old plastic doll or animal toy in patterns.

Create your own floral figure

- 1 Place your paper on the floor. Politely ask your model to lie down with their head and shoulders on top of the paper. If they have long hair, ask them to tie it back so you can get a clear outline of their neck and ears.
- 2 With the lead pencil, carefully trace around your model's head and shoulders.
- 3 Go over your outline with a black texta, fixing any wobbly lines as you go.
- 4 Add a simple face in black texta. Ah Xian has said that the closed eyes of his figures “provide a more inward-looking feeling.” Will your figure have closed or open eyes? Are they feeling happy, sad, calm or curious...?
- 5 Draw flowers inside your figure outline, looking at the real flowers you have collected for reference. Flowers can be quite complex to draw, so use lead pencil first. Try to fill up the whole outline.
- 6 Go over your flower outlines with coloured texta. Then colour them in with coloured pencils.

image detail Ah Xian, China/Australia, born 1960, Jingdong Cloisonné Factory, manufacturer, China, *Human human – cloisonné bust 3*, 2001, Dachang County, Hebei Province, cloisonné enamel on copper, 45.0 x 42.5 x 25.5 cm; Gift of ETSA Utilities and the Art Gallery of South Australia Foundation 2006, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, © courtesy the artist.

We would love to see your work! Ask your parent or carer to post a photo on Instagram and tag the Art Gallery of South Australia. Or you can email your photo to us at public.programs@artgallery.sa.gov.au

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