



Kiss earth, 2014
bronze

La Trobe University, Geoff Raby Collection of Chinese Art.
Donated by Dr Geoff Raby AO through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2019. © Jian Jun Xi.
Photo: Jia De

In *Kiss earth* (2014), a small sculpture of a man with his cheek pressed against the ground, Jian Jun Xi satirises the subservience of individuals to power – the power of governments, of institutions, of the art world. *Kiss earth*, of course, sounds tellingly similar to an insult often used to describe the sycophantic.

The sculpture memorialises a 2010 performance by Xi and his long-time collaborator Cai Yuan, during which they created a roadblock with their bodies on Tottenham Court Road, London. This kind of disruptive action is characteristic of the artists' work. The pair gained fame through their iconoclastic interventions into the Euro–North American canon, with more egregious examples including pillow-fighting on Tracey Emin's installation *My bed* (1998) and urinating on Duchamp's readymade of a urinal, *Fountain* (1917).

By casting himself in bronze – the medium of permanence, of public monuments to the long dead – the artist seems to have bought into the values of an art world that he once mocked, allowing himself to be institutionalised. But *Kiss earth* is lowly, earth-bound, more of a tripping hazard than an object of elevated contemplation. And if you were to trip, to disrupt the silence of the gallery with a yelp of shock as you fell, the artist would likely raise his head and laugh impishly, gleeful at having transformed the pious white box into a playground once again.

Genevieve Trail, 2022