



Communication series – Big Ben, 2001
chromogenic print

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

Lying prostrate, arms outstretched in the configuration of a cross, Cang Xin stretches open his mouth and extends his tongue to press just the tip into London pavement stones, oblivious to pedestrians sidestepping the obstruction presented by his body.

Moving through the world tongue-first, Cang claims that he is seeking an intimate and phenomenological encounter with matter. By using his tongue, the artist displaces a Western bias towards vision in favour of a more submissive and sensitive engagement with material nature, using other sensory receptors – the tactile, olfactory and gustatory. The reverence and receptiveness invoked by the act of prostration are, however, belied by the life-sized model that the artist made in his image in 2006. He has deified himself permanently in this position, sealing his ego off from the world within a silica-gel mausoleum.

Cang's decision to insert his body into sites that explicitly denote nations – the Great Wall of China, Moscow's Red Square, London's Big Ben, Rome's Colosseum – positions his body strategically as an interface between the local and the worldly, or China and the West. The method of 'communication' practised by Cang might be read as the metabolism of Western power from the sites of its performance, or, alternatively, the submission of the foreign body in the face of the West's hegemonic strength.

In this way, *Communication series*, a body of work that the artist began in 1996, exists in dialogue with the work of other Asian artists who have, at various times, created serialised performance photographs that engage with, intervene in, or leverage the symbolism of public monuments, including Yayoi Kusama's anti-war happenings of the 1960s, Kwok Mangho/Frog King's performance series *Plastic bag projects* (1979), Chinese American artist Tseng Kwong Chi's *East meets West* (1979–89), Ai Weiwei's *Study of perspective* (1995–2017) and Song Dong's *Breathing* (1996).

Genevieve Trail, 2022