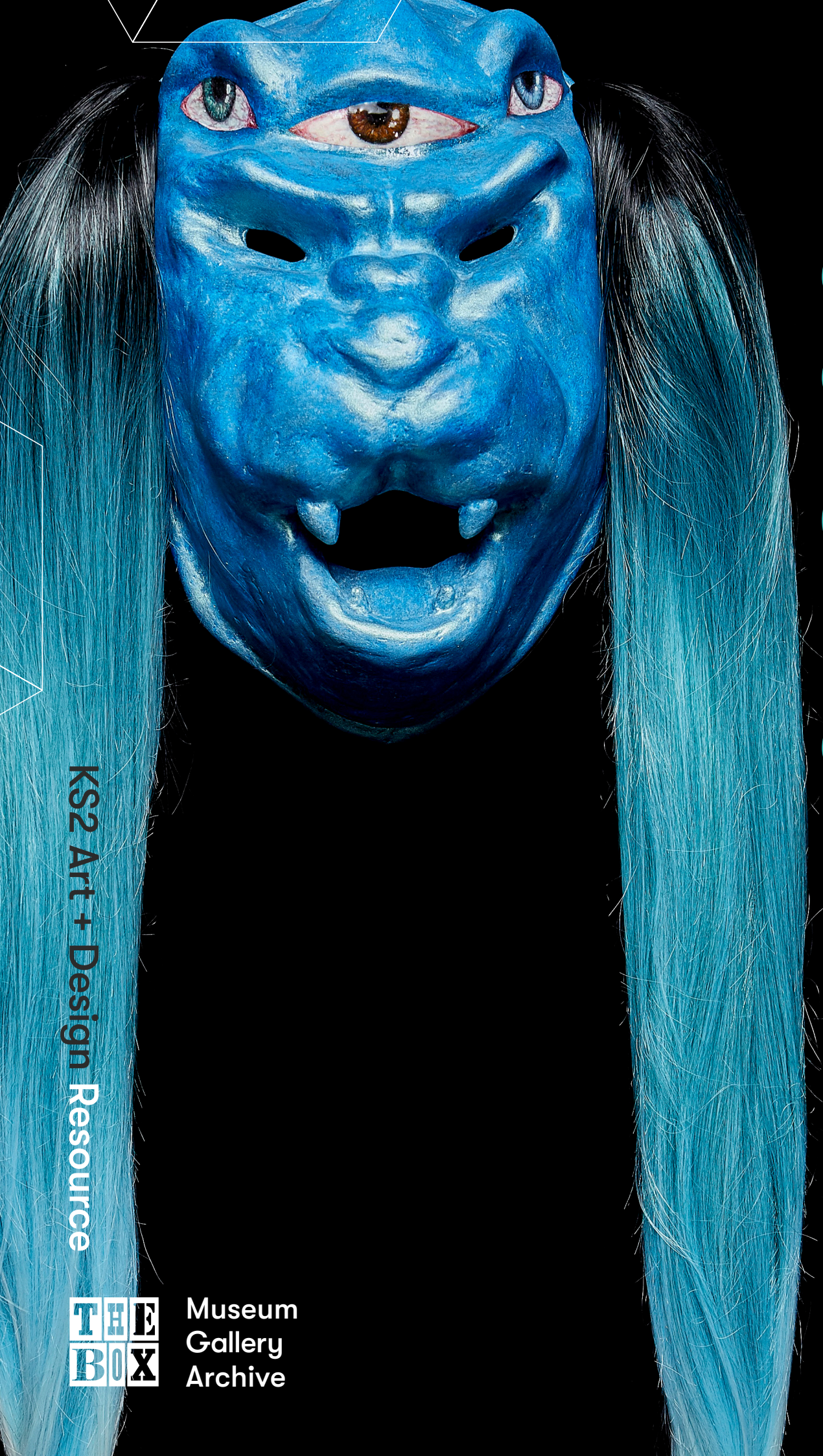


Zaddie Xa



KS2 Art + Design Resource



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The Box is Plymouth's new multi-million pound museum, gallery and archive. With brand new exhibition spaces alongside state-of-the-art facilities for research and learning, it's the perfect place to teach, inspire and engage students of all ages.

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About Zadie Xa

Zadie Xa was born in Vancouver, Canada on unceded, ancestral and continually asserted territories of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations and is now based in London, UK.

Her work is informed by her experiences within the Korean diaspora, as well as the environmental and cultural context of the Pacific Northwest. Her work often features garments, including cloaks and masks, used for live performance and within installation or moving image. Throughout her practice, Xa uses water and marine ecologies as metaphors for exploring the unknown, whilst also alluding to abstract notions of homeland.

Xa's practice is highly collaborative, and she has developed ongoing exchanges with dancers, musicians and actors. Since 2006, Xa has worked closely with artist Benito Mayor Vallejo. Together they have staged live performance, moving image, installations and painting.

Zadie earned an MA in Painting at the Royal College of Art in 2014 and a BFA at the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design in 2007.

In 2018 The Box, Plymouth acquired two artworks by Xa, as part of the CAS Collections Fund at Frieze.



Kuhimo

A *kumiho* is a creature that appears in the folktales and legends of Korea. Korean *kumiho* shares many similarities to the Chinese *huli jing* and the Japanese *kitsune*.

The *kumiho*, or ‘nine tailed fox’ is typically depicted as a shapeshifter, taking a female form when transforming into a human being. There are numerous tales in which the *kumiho* appears, several of which can be found in the encyclopedic *Compendium of Korean Oral Literature*.

The old Chinese text *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, the earliest record to document the nine-tailed fox, mentioned that the fox with nine tails came from and lived in the country called Qingqiu, the term that meant “the country of east” and later specifically used to refer to Korea. *Kumiho* and other versions of the nine-tailed fox myths and folklores share a similar concept. All explain fox spirits as being the result of great longevity or the accumulation of energy, said to be foxes who have lived for a thousand years, and give them the power of shapeshifting, usually appearing in the guise of a woman.

However, while China’s *huli jing* and Japan’s *kitsune* are often depicted as possibly ‘good’ or ‘bad’, the *kumiho* is almost always treated as a malignant figure who feasts on human flesh. It is unclear at which point in time Koreans began viewing the *kumiho* as a purely evil creature, since many ancient texts mention the benevolent *kumiho* assisting humans (and even make mentions of wicked humans tricking a kind but naïve *kumiho*).

Tigers and *Yoke thé*

In Myanmar, a tiger (*Kyar*) is a common sight in *Yoke thé*, or traditional marionette puppetry.

A thread runs through the traditional marionette shows - starting from the beginning of the world, inhabited by spirits, continuing with the creation of the animal kingdom and mankind, and finally ending in the foundation of the kingdom. First there has to be a world - populated by spirits, animals and humans who have founded a kingdom, before any drama can be staged in that kingdom. The continuous creation and subsequent destruction of the world, caused by human greed, hatred and ignorance is represented by music that accompanies the performance. Its climax is the beating of cymbals, gongs and a big drum, symbolising the different kinds of destruction: by fire, water and wind. With the final beat, the world is considered created.

These puppet shows were travelling theatres, touring over great distances and consisting of a large company of performers. While on tour the troupes staged free shows in villages and were granted board and lodging by villagers. The company were hidden behind a backdrops, invisible to the spectators. An orchestra was placed between the stage front and the spectators. Up to seven musicians made up the traditional orchestra.

In the show, characters are introduced in succession, starting with a number of human characters. After *Nan Belu* the city ogre and *Taw Belu*, the jungle ogre leave the stage, *Hsin* the elephant appears and begins to dance. Because of his sheer mass his 'dance' is merely a swaying to and fro. His arch rival, *Kyar* the tiger joins the stage and begins dancing artistically. After spotting the elephant, he starts a fight, cheered on by the audience. The elephant usually wins that fight.

Articulated *Kyar* puppet

Painted wood, metal and plant fibre, 19th century, Myanmar
1934.25.86



Idea for activity

What are you now?

Many ancient myths and stories include shapeshifting - from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and Circe transforming Odysseus' men to pigs in Homer's *The Odyssey* from Ancient Greece, to Odin and the trickster Loki from Norse mythology and in the Cornish story '*Jack the Giant Killer*'. More well known shapeshifting creatures in folklore are werewolves and vampires.

While the popular idea of a shapeshifter is of a human being who turns into something else, there are numerous stories about animals that can transform themselves as well.

Rather than becoming a malevolent shapeshifter like the *kumiho*, a cunning trickster like Loki, or even shapeshifting as a form of punishment, such as when Zeus transformed King Lycaon and his children into wolves, if you could shapeshift to create a positive outcome for the world, what would you transform into?

For example, tribes such as the Navajo talk about a more positive role shapeshifting plays in the formation of Native American culture. Often referring to the practice as 'skinwalking', shapeshifters transform into the bodies of bears, wolves, and eagles for the purpose of healing and protecting their communities. In Northumberland, the traditional story of the *Hedley Kow*, a kind of mischievous shapeshifting elf that would transform itself into from pieces of gold, to a lump of silver, to a lump of iron then to a rock and finally to the Hedley Kow. As it runs off laughing, the main character thinks about the good luck she has had seeing the elf for herself, so it can be seen as a story of optimism.

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