Why do you make art?

Certainly I do not make art purely for the sake of art. Art is a path that allows us to understand reality, to understand real things, to understand life and not the other way around. Art gives us many possibilities.

Where do you derive your inspiration from?

It is related to my cultural background. My roots are in China, so that is the basis of my inspiration. On the other hand, my inspiration comes from the most trivial things, inspiration can strike in the most unexpected places….

How do you feel about the fact that your artworks presented at this year’s International Day against Nuclear Tests at the UN in Vienna?

I am very thankful and happy about that. It is a very important topic for me how to deal in an artistic way with nuclear testing and nuclear weapons. I really hope that the danger and cruelty of nuclear tests can be demonstrated in my art.

At the event to mark the International Day against Nuclear Tests in Vienna, Xiaoyu Li made a brief personal statement:

As a twenty-year-old, I have not experienced as much as you have. But I understand that war will bring nothing but destruction and death, bring hatred to human beings, but I’m still far from knowing what nuclear tests and nuclear weapons will bring us.

As an artist, I can show you the beauty, the kindness and happiness through art forms, and I can also show you the ugliness, badness and terror of the world after nuclear explosions and nuclear tests. I hope that by doing so, the danger and cruelty of nuclear tests can be demonstrated.

The ultimate goal of art is to eulogize peace. By a series of art shows and exhibitions, artists around the globe will be able to enhance the awareness of nuclear tests, to fight against any anti-peace activity, and to push for the elimination of nuclear tests, to bring an end to threats and hatred.

Thanks for the invitation from the United Nations. It is my honour and responsibility to be here, and like all of you sitting here today, I sincerely wish for this exhibition to be a success, and a world full of love.

Thank you very much!

Contemporary artist Xiaoyu Li has spent the last few years travelling between the United States and China, which has left a profound mark on her painting style and ideas. Although her work is heavily influenced by the works of Western masters, it also demonstrates a strong attachment to Chinese traditional art and conveys a complex combination of Western and Chinese aesthetics. Lately, she has been experimenting with how to portray the issues of nuclear radiation, explosion and testing through art.
At the initiative of Kazakhstan, 29 August was declared as the International Day against Nuclear Tests by the UN’s General Assembly in 2009. The day aims to raise awareness about the dangers of nuclear tests and calls for a total ban. The date marks both the first nuclear test conducted at the Semipalatinsk nuclear test site in 1949, as well as the site’s closure in 1991 by modern-day Kazakhstan.

This year’s celebrations of the International Day against Nuclear Tests featured works by artists from Austria, China, Kazakhstan, and the United States which were shown in China, at the CTBTO’s headquarters in Vienna, Austria, as well as at United Nations headquarters in New York, United States.

The works of art on display showed the variety and diversity of experiences and of creative expression. Mediums ranged from Chinese calligraphy, to painting to photo collages. The differences in the tone and emphases of the artwork also demonstrated the freedom which art offers to engage with nuclear testing on a personal level. While some artwork was disquieting in showing the effects of nuclear tests, other exhibits were ironic and darkly satirical, and most looked hopefully towards a future free of nuclear weapons, conveying messages of peace. Nonetheless, they all seemed to agree on one point: that banning nuclear tests and eliminating weapons should be an international priority.

A catalogue of the exhibits is available on the CTBTO website: ctbto.org/specials/international-day-against-nuclear-tests-29-august/
»29 August serves as a reminder that banning nuclear testing remains unfinished business.«

CTBTO Executive Secretary, Lassina Zerbo