

Art exhibition puts spotlight on China's ethnic groups



The NoHo House gallery with Phil Akashi's artworks on the wall



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The Belgian artist Phil Akashi is showcasing his 'Aesthetics of Language' solo exhibition at **Barcelona's NoHo House gallery** from September 22 to October 7. In this project, he explores the Confucian notion of the great unity, and observes how modern China, and its 56 ethnic groups, is embracing diversity as an asset for a harmonious world

Akashi started the **project 'Legend of the Dragon' in 2015** and since then, he has been visiting the Asian country to meet with 55 ethnic minorities and the Han majority. His goal was to do site-specific artworks in the environment of each ethnicity, creating a dialogue **stretching from east to west**. "China is a very big and a very diverse country," Phil Akashi said to Catalan News. "In this project, I was interested in trying to understand how such a big and diverse country could continue to develop at such a fast pace and in the same time try keep a certain unity and harmony," he added.

When asked about the UN reports about the "serious human rights violation" the Chinese government is accused of having perpetrated on the **Uyghur minority**, Akashi did not directly refer to it, and instead

explained his visit to the heart of the Silk Road, in the **Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region**. He sourced local silk and created an artwork spraying onto the silk with imprints of traditional Chinese seals with Chinese characters descendants of the dragon, depicting the dragon as a spiritual symbol of the Chinese unity and pride for the country. The Belgian artist wanted to "celebrate the region's textile culture, its people, and its nature," placing the artworks on a caravan of camels in the Taklamakan desert. The Taklamakan desert was one of the great obstacles in the path of the Silk Road Merchants on their way to the Middle East. The trading activities along the Silk Road have facilitated the transmission of goods, ideas and culture over many centuries.



Phil Akashi's site-specific artwork in the Taklamakan Desert

This is one of his site-specific artworks integrated into each society that he worked on while visiting China. Just before returning to the studio where he worked on paintings inspired by his trips.

He wanted to "create East/West dialogue using **different languages from China** and elements from their culture or identity," he explained to this media outlet.

The Belgian painter created more than 20 site-specific artworks using different techniques and materials such as fabrics from ethnic minorities he shared after his experiences in China. In the exhibition at NoHo House gallery, attendees can see some of **Akashi's colorful paintings alongside fabric compositions** and mosaics.

To meet the dozens of ethnic minority groups, the Belgian artist traveled to Hong Kong, Beijing, and Shanghai, but also to Harbin in Heilongjiang province, on the border with Russia. Akashi also visited Qinghai, the second biggest Tibetan region in the country, and Xinjiang, at the western border next to Tajikistan and Afghanistan. "It is really big distances, and in each region, you **have a real variety of minorities**," he said when recalling his trip.



Zhu Jingyang, Cónsul General of People's Republic of China in Barcelona



Phil Akashi's artworks at NoHo House