

**MEDIA RELEASE**

University Galleries of Illinois State University is pleased to present *Phillip Chen: No Ideas but in Things* from June 5 through August 13, 2023. All events are free and open to the public.

This exhibition surveys the work of [Phillip Chen](https://phillipchen1.com/home.html), a printmaker and painter born in Chicago in 1953. The works included were made between 1982 and 2010. Altogether, they reveal a consistency of thought that has underpinned Chen’s art through several major stylistic shifts.

The exhibition’s title is drawn from the poem [*Paterson*](https://archive.org/stream/PatersonWCW/Paterson-William_Carlos_Williams_djvu.txt) by William Carlos Williams, and speaks to the unsteady relationship between thoughts, what they are about, and how they are conveyed. Throughout his career, Chen’s work has been defined by an oscillation between its philosophical rigor and its commitment to objects in the world. Though deeply conceptual, his approach has always been predicated on the notion that there are “no ideas but in things.”

For his delicate early pictures of improbable landscapes, Chen constructed models of sites he imagined, studying them exhaustively to master the peculiarities of their form and the play of light upon them. In his more recent etchings, photographic images of the various artifacts which the artist has spent decades collecting mingle with hand-drawn illustrations of the same. The result is a network of symbols derived from objects Chen has made or acquired, which extends through every work in this exhibition.

The most recurrent of these symbols is the boat. Partly, this is attributable to the capacity of ships to signify change and instability, but also motion and progress. Partly, it relates to Chen’s interest in the passage across the Pacific which his ancestors made from China 165 years ago. In the United States, their alienation from the world they had known initiated a search for cultural meaning akin to Chen’s own obsession with the mutable meanings of things. It is less a fidelity to these things, however, than a hounding desire to understand how humans imbue them with meaning that has anchored Chen’s image-making for more than 40 years.

In 2022, Chen was selected as the University Galleries Award winner for *Beyond the Norm 2022*, a juried exhibition organized by [Normal Editions Workshop](https://normaleditions.illinoisstate.edu/about/) to celebrate the Workshop’s 45th anniversary. Normal Editions is a non-profit print research facility within the Wonsook Kim School of Art at Illinois State University.

*Phillip Chen: No Ideas but in Things* is curated by Troy Sherman, Curator at University Galleries. The exhibition is supported in part by University Galleries’ grant from the Illinois Arts Council Agency.

**Artist Biography**

Phillip Chen has exhibited extensively both nationally and internationally, and his work is in the collections of institutions such as the Brooklyn Museum, New York Public Library, Carnegie Museum of Art, Art Institute of Chicago, and San Francisco Museum of Fine Arts. His work has been supported by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, Illinois Arts Council, and Iowa Arts Council. Chen is the recipient of both the Louis B. Comfort Tiffany Award and Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant; in 2018, he received a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship. He has been nominated for the Queen Sonja Print Award 2018, the largest prize given to an artist working in print media worldwide. Chen received a B.F.A from the University of Illinois at Chicago, and an M.F.A. from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He has taught at Drake University in Des Moines, IA since 1996.

**Events**

* Saturday, June 24, from noon to 2:00 p.m.

All-ages art-making workshop. No registration required. Materials and instruction will be provided.

* Wednesday, July 26, from 12:00 to 2:00 p.m.

Tour of the exhibition with curator Troy Sherman, followed by an all-ages artmaking workshop. [Registration is required](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=OphfCGkLcEK3HRBpUHa6_kx-qOKn8YxDrMuxRtAfh9xUOFhWV0JMMkJLNEdVM1NMNkozNEJKT0JPWC4u). Materials and instruction will be provided.

* Saturday, August 5, from noon to 2:00 p.m.

All-ages art-making workshop. No registration required. Materials and instruction will be provided.

* Thursday, August 10, from 2:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Tour of the exhibition with curator Troy Sherman, followed by an all-ages artmaking workshop. [Registration required](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=OphfCGkLcEK3HRBpUHa6_kx-qOKn8YxDrMuxRtAfh9xUODlCUzJQQzJVRFIzUDlTS1QzRUlVMlhGMi4u). Materials and instruction will be provided.

* Thursday, August 10, from 4:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Closing reception for the exhibition, with artist Phillip Chen in attendance. Light refreshments will be provided.

* Free curator-led exhibition tours and workshops are available by appointment for classes and community groups. Contact Gallery@IllinoisState.edu to schedule.
* Additional workshops will be announced via University Galleries’ social media.

University Galleries, a unit in the Wonsook Kim College of Fine Arts, is located at 11 Uptown Circle, Suite 103, at the corner of Beaufort and Broadway streets. Parking is available in the Uptown Station parking deck located directly above University Galleries—the first hour is free, as well as any time after 5:01 p.m.

You can find [University Galleries](https://galleries.illinoisstate.edu/) on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/UniversityGalleries), [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/universitygalleriesisu/), and [Twitter](https://twitter.com/UGalleriesISU), and sign up to receive email updates through the [newsletter](https://visitor.r20.constantcontact.com/manage/optin?v=0017wkX2ma9Iz6YGXhiHaPkYlJ0Jep7qNDrUe6TlgGIh7Cn2AC77NtvDdjrsE56jJ3kL_6LqtbDcHtf3TbTaZ7cLZMWoGJ3uUU5OhImgL_ybAk%3D). Please contact Gallery@IllinoisState.edu or call (309) 438-5487 if you need to arrange an accommodation to participate in any events related to these exhibitions.