



ARTWORK **THE SPIRIT OF LAW | IOWA REPORTS**

ARTIST **XIAOZE XIE**

INSTALLED 2005  
U.S. COURTHOUSE  
DAVENPORT, IOWA

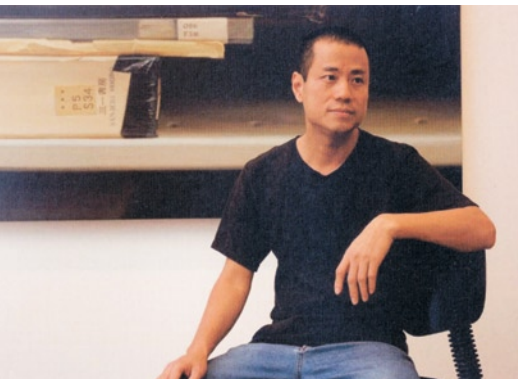
For the renovated courthouse in Davenport, Xiaoze Xie created a pair of monumental paintings that reference the Enlightenment foundations of the American legal system and the development of the law in Iowa. Xie stated he hoped that the two paintings will prompt visitors “to contemplate the connections between history and the present, between ideas and realities.”

To foster these connections, Xie carefully considered the subject and composition of each painting. *Iowa Reports* depicts a set of orderly, if somewhat careworn, nineteenth-century Iowa Supreme Court reports made available to the artist by U.S. Magistrate Judge Celeste Bremer. The companion painting, *The Spirit of Law*, focuses on a collection of thematically resonant volumes that Xie researched and photographed at the Rare Books and Manuscripts Collection of the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, including Montesquieu’s *The Spirit of Laws*, Rousseau’s *Social Contract*, Paine’s *Rights of Man*, Hamilton’s *Federalist*, and Blackburn’s *Commentaries*.

Despite the immense historical importance of the ideas contained within these texts, Xie’s paintings focus chiefly on the physical qualities of the books themselves. Xie has skillfully portrayed the intimate topography of each abrasion, frayed edge, and cracked spine. The artist has stated: “I see books as a material form of something abstract, such as philosophy and ideology. I have also been fascinated by what people do to books: banning, destroying, glorifying with gold-leaf, or worshiping as ultimate truth.” Thus, Xie’s close attention to the appearance of each book in his paintings serves an emblematic purpose: just as these books have been battered by time, and must be cared for and protected, so too must the ideas inside be nurtured and safeguarded over time.

Like many painters, Xie uses photography as a starting point for his work. In our current age of global and digital mass media, in which we are daily bombarded with an avalanche of images, the relationship between painting and photography is complex. Xie’s painting technique skillfully addresses and exploits the nuances of this relationship. Despite the paintings’ origins in photography, the final imagery is unmistakably mediated through the artist’s brush. Areas of the working photograph that are blurry as a result of distance from its focal point become painterly





abstractions on the canvas. By maintaining this reference to photography in his paintings, Xie paradoxically creates the best opportunities to display his dazzling brushwork. The monumental scale of Xie's paintings is also impressive, as historically still-life painting was practiced on a much more intimate scale. Xie's work revitalizes and expands the still-life tradition for a civic forum. WC

**Xiaoze Xie** was born in Guangdong, China, in 1966. He earned his BA in architecture in 1988 from Tsinghua University in Beijing, his MFA in 1991 from the Central Academy of Arts and Design in Beijing, and another MFA in 1996 from the University of North Texas in Denton. Since 1999, Xie has taught in the Department of Art and Art History at Bucknell University in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania.

Xie's work is part of the permanent collections of the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston, the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art in Arizona, and the Arizona State University Art Museum in Tempe, among others. Individual exhibitions of Xie's work include *Transient Memories: Works on Paper by Xiaoze Xie* (2007) at the Danish Cultural Center in Beijing; *Xiaoze Xie: Works on Paper* (2007) at the Modern Chinese Art Foundation in Ghent, Belgium; and *Order: Installation and Paintings by Xiaoze Xie* (2000) at the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art. Among the group exhibitions that have featured Xie's work are *Shu: Reinventing Books in Contemporary Chinese Art* (2006-07) at the Chinese Institute gallery in New York and the Seattle Asian Art Museum; *The Daily News* (2005-06) at the Salt Lake Art Center in Utah, the Boise Art Museum in Idaho, and the Nicolaysen Art Museum in Casper, Wyoming; and *Regeneration: Contemporary Chinese Art from China and the U.S.* (2004-06) organized by the Samek Art Gallery at Bucknell University, which also traveled to seven other university art galleries.

MEDIUM OIL ON CANVAS  
 DIMENSIONS TWO PAINTINGS, EACH 8 FT 7 IN X 6 FT

