



# **Xu Bing: Tianshu: Passages in the Making of a Book**

*John Cayley, Lydia Liu*

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Chinese-born, U.S.-based artist Xu Bing (born 1955) makes epic, language-based sculptures, books and installations that are frequently inspired by China's rich heritage of print culture and bookmaking. This beautifully designed volume records his acclaimed work "Tianshu" (or "Book from the Sky"). "Tianshu" consists of four volumes of unreadable "Chinese" characters printed in a traditional Chinese style from 4,000 hand-carved pieces of wood type. (The number of invented characters was based on the actual number of characters in common usage in China.) It took Xu Bing four years to carve the type and create the characters for this extraordinary work, which he first conceived in 1986 as "a book that no one would ever be able to read." The volume includes Xu Bing's own account of the work's genesis, as well as extended commentary by a range of scholars.



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