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BY TONIA ECKFELD, WAYNE CROTHERS & ANNIKA AITKEN

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LUISE GUEST

Luise Guest is Manager of Research for the White Rabbit Collection in Sydney. Her writing about Chinese art has been published in a range of online and print journals and her book, *Half the Sky: Conversations with Women Artists in China*, was published by Piper Press in 2016. Her current PhD research examines women artists who subvert traditions of ink painting and calligraphy.



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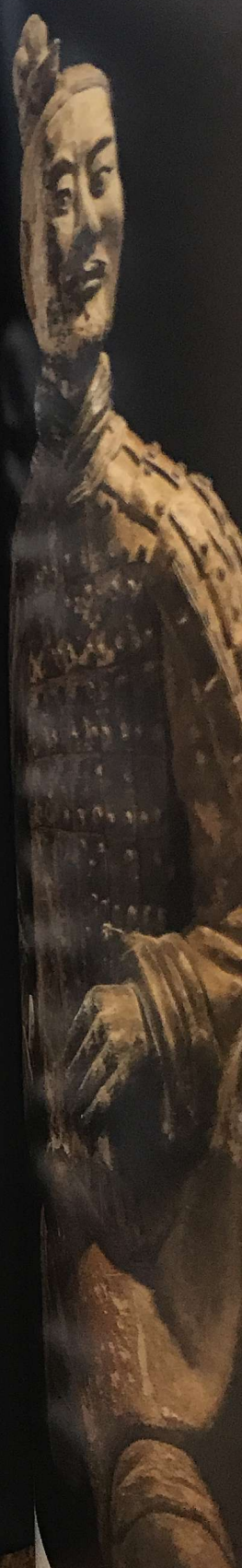
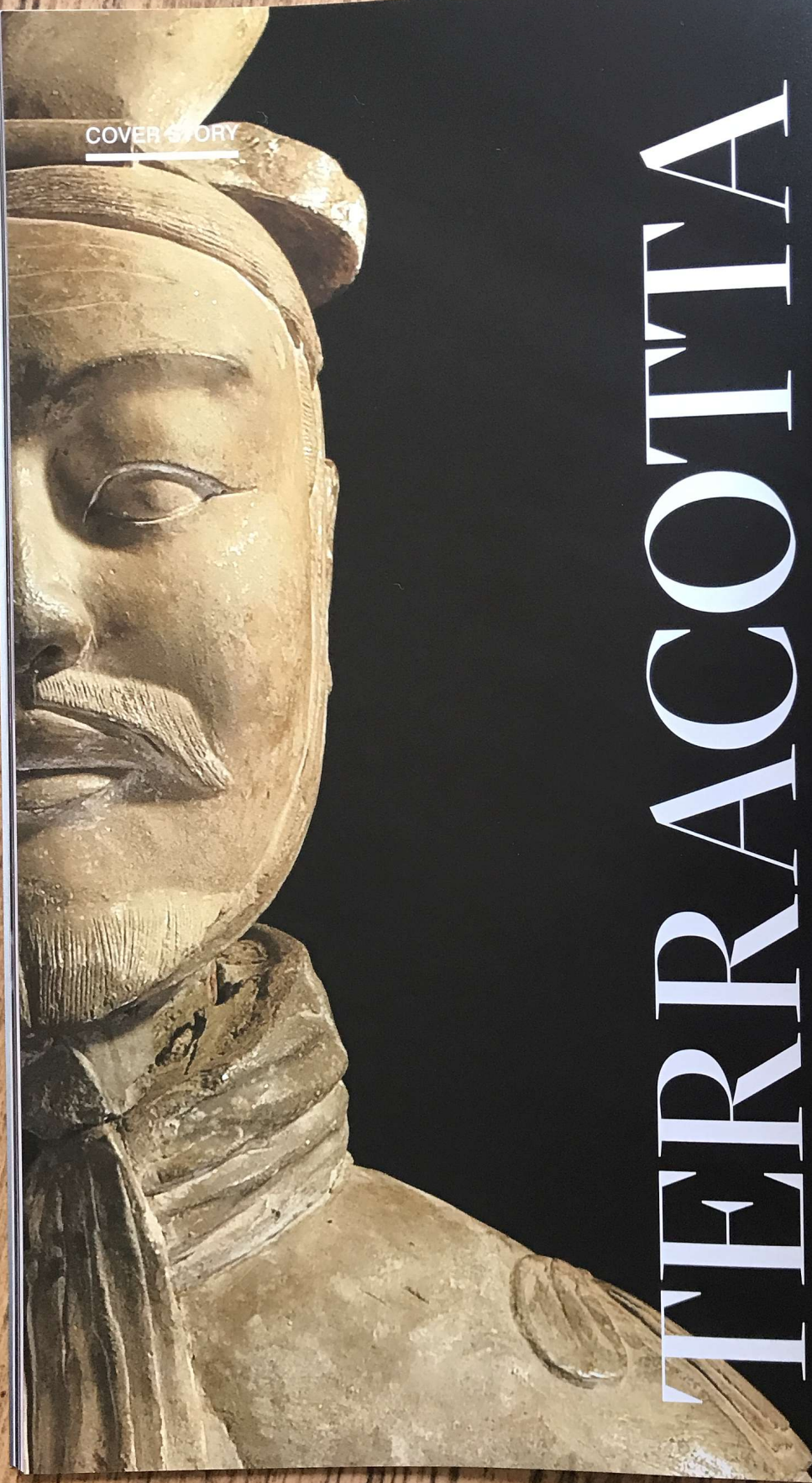
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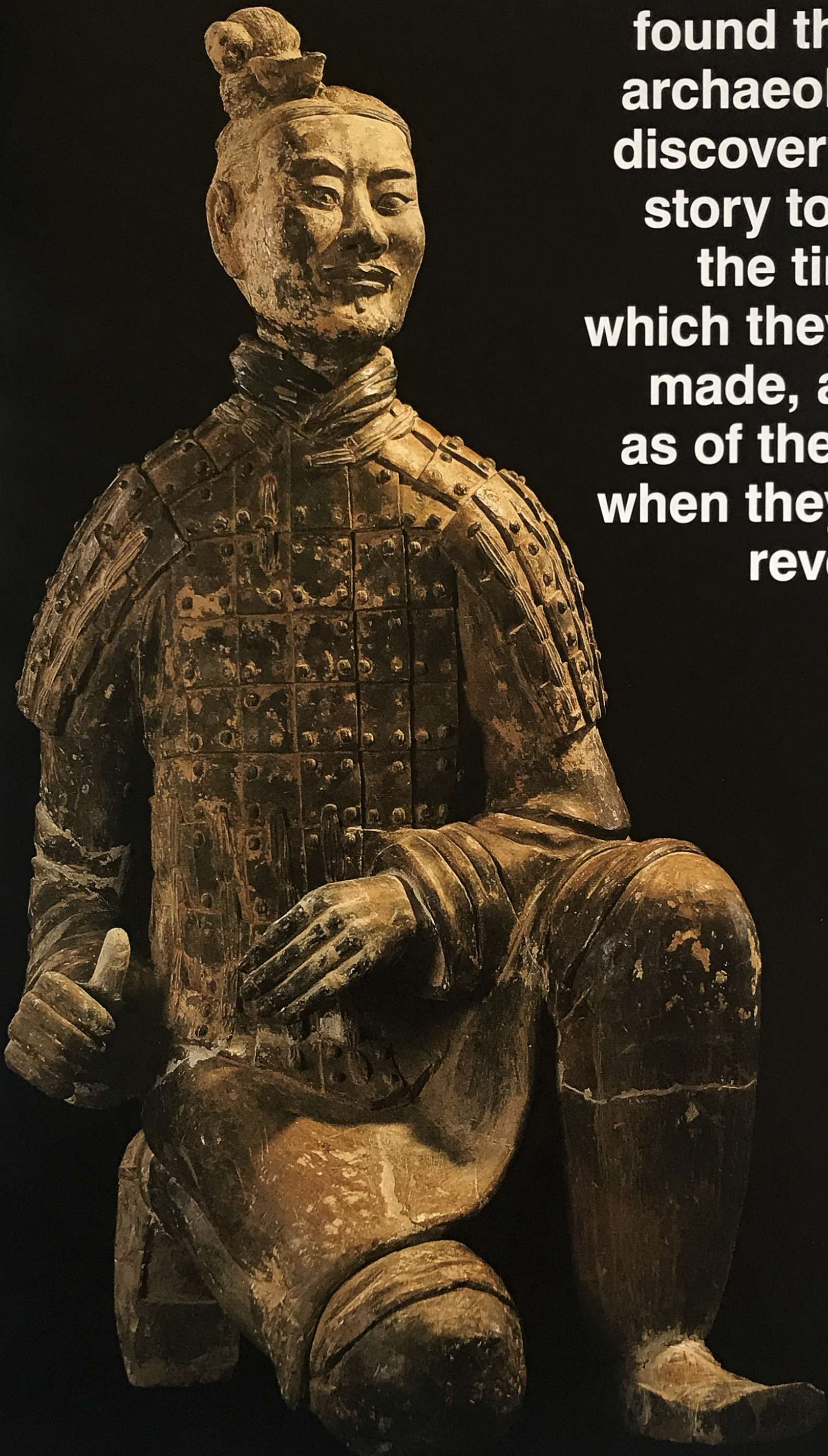
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COVER STORY

TERRACOTTA WARRIORS



**‘Objects
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The Qin Emperor's Army with Feet of Clay

A king at thirteen, a terrifying ruler at thirty-eight, and an enormous tomb replete with hand-crafted life-size warriors, animals and treasures buried underneath farmland for 2000 years.

BY TONIA ECKFELD

When the awe-inspiring terracotta army of Qin Shihuang (259–210 BCE) was discovered in 1974, so too was the military might of China's self-proclaimed first emperor. New evidence about the past, changing our understanding of history and knowledge about the brief Qin dynasty, has dramatically come to light through archaeological discoveries at Qin Shihuang's mausoleum site.

Qin Shihuang came to the Qin throne at age thirteen when Qin was one of seven different kingdoms at war with one another. One by one he conquered the other states and in 221 BCE, aged thirty-eight, he alone held power over the people, lands and wealth of all the subjugated kingdoms. He maintained absolute control over his new Qin Empire, ruling in peacetime using his wartime strategy of domination by military force.

He destroyed the defensive walls of his enemies and extended his own and ordered the construction of a vast transport network of superhighways and canals extending from Xianyang, the Qin capital (near present-day Xi'an), to every compass point at the furthest reaches of his empire. He applied firm repression to suppress the divided population, and his reforms ensured legalist and economic control through the introduction of uniform Qin standards of written script, weights, measurements, axle widths and currency.

Qin Shihuang's terrifying reputation was documented in the historical records of the Han dynasty, which followed the Qin. The expenditure of inestimable resources on a tomb for the emperor's body and soul to occupy after his death, while the living suffered, was a palpable demonstration of this. Artisan and ordinary workers slaved under harsh conditions, production expectations and quality-control regulations. Testament to his cruelty is the discovery at the mausoleum site of pits of skeletons many layers deep belonging to people worked to death, their bodies tossed away like human garbage, in stark contrast to the elaborate and luxurious burial Qin Shihuang demanded for himself.

Archaeological excavations at the first emperor's Mount Li mausoleum complex have revealed around 2000 larger-than-life likenesses of the Qin emperor's soldier enforcers, with 4000 to 6000 more still buried in pits at the site. The terracotta warriors capture that reign of terror in their scale, number and individual character. Individually crafted, they embody the martial spirit, force and vitality of the troops at the Qin emperor's command. Awe-inspiring in number, stature and expression, they are organised in hierarchies of battle order and equipped with warhorses, chariots and real weapons. There are around 40,000 bronze and some iron artefacts, including real swords, spears, halberds, arrows and crossbows of the highest manufacturing quality and finest metallurgic composition, including examples using chromium-oxide plating on weapons that remain sharp and shiny today. Suits of body armour and helmets, which would have been made of leather in real life, were replicated in stone and stored in armoury pits at the tomb complex. The colossal scale and quantity of the tomb wares and the production methods used are

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evidence of the engineering and technological excellence of the period of extreme luxury, beauty and art reserved for the emperor's tomb in the tomb. Examples include forty-six life-size bronze birds, twenty swans and twenty horses in a pit at the tomb recreating a stream. The complexity of the metallurgic ingredients, the methods and technical expertise without precedent in China.

Qin Shihuang conquered the kingdoms through military might, a single vast empire, proclaimed to be the first emperor of the Han dynasty, and succeeded in the construction of a tomb which was unprecedented in scale. Despite this, his dynasty was the shortest-lived in Chinese history, fifteen years (221–207 BCE). He said that the formidable 'feet of clay', as his successors called it, was his failure. The Qin system was so fully centralised that the emperor as supreme, after twelve years, that upon his death was no one who could succeed. Qin Shihuang died unexpectedly in China's east, his son secret and a fake imperial heir, Prince Fusu, ordering his own suicide. This deception allowed Qin Shihuang's eighteen-year-old son, Ershi, the second emperor, to ascend the throne. After only three years, a weak and ineffectual emperor, by his most trusted minister's suicide, he was aged thirty-eight, forty-six days before his death. He was later killed in the rebellion, marked the fall of the Qin dynasty and the rise of the Han dynasty.

Where the present is, there is dialogue. Objects of archaeological discovery tell of the times in which they were made, as well as of the times they were revealed. As they shift from ancient culture to our modern world, a kind of time travel where objects accumulate meaning with each new encounter with them. The terracotta army of China's

evidence of the engineering and technological excellence of the period. Objects of extreme luxury, beauty and cost, reserved for the emperor, were also found in the tomb. Examples include the forty-six life-size bronze birds (six cranes, twenty swans and twenty geese) found in a pit at the tomb recreating a freshwater stream. The complexity of their artistry, metallurgic ingredients, fabrication methods and technical execution was without precedent in China.

Qin Shihuang conquered neighbouring kingdoms through military might to create a single vast empire, proclaimed himself to be the first emperor of a new Qin dynasty, and succeeded in his demand for construction of a tomb, the scale of which was unprecedented in China. Yet despite this, his dynasty was the shortest-lived in Chinese history, lasting only fifteen years (221–207 BCE). It could be said that the formidable Qin Shihuang had 'feet of clay', as his success was also his failure. The Qin system of government was so fully centralised with the first emperor as supreme, autocratic head for twelve years, that upon his death, there was no one who could fill his shoes. When Qin Shihuang died unexpectedly while on tour in China's east, his death was kept secret and a fake imperial edict was sent to his eldest son, heir apparent Crown Prince Fusu, ordering him to commit suicide. This deception resulted in Qin Shihuang's eighteenth son, Hu Hai, ascending the throne to become Qin Ershi, the second emperor of the Qin dynasty. After only three years, Hu Hai, a weak and ineffectual ruler, was forced by his most trusted minister to commit suicide; he was aged twenty-four. The third Qin emperor, Ziyi, ruled for just forty-six days before being deposed, and was later killed in the rebellions that marked the fall of the Qin dynasty and the rise of the Han dynasty.

Where the present meets the past, there is dialogue. Objects found through archaeological discovery have a story to tell of the times in which they were made, as well as of the times when they were revealed. As they shift from their place in ancient culture to our contemporary world, a kind of time travel takes place where objects accumulate new layers of meaning with each new generation that encounters them. The 1974 discovery of the terracotta warriors took place during China's Great Proletarian Cultural

Revolution (1966–76) when Chairman Mao's policy of 'using the past to serve the present' gave particular impetus to archaeological work in China. The warriors took on a resonance for a politically and militarily strong unified China under powerful leadership. Today, the terracotta warriors as art objects have become cultural ambassadors, travelling to all parts of the world as the material embodiment of China's long history, material heritage and cultural sophistication.

TERRACOTTA WARRIORS: GUARDIANS OF IMMORTALITY IS ON DISPLAY FROM 24 MAY TO 13 OCTOBER AT NGV INTERNATIONAL. PROFESSOR TONIA ECKFELD IS PRINCIPAL FELLOW AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE, DISTINGUISHED RESEARCH FELLOW AT NORTHWESTERN POLYTECHNICAL UNIVERSITY IN XI'AN, CHINA. *TERRACOTTA WARRIORS: GUARDIANS OF IMMORTALITY* IS SUPPORTED BY PRINCIPAL PARTNER GOLDEN AGE GROUP.

(previous)

CHINESE

Armoured general

Qin Dynasty 221–207 BCE (detail)
Emperor Qin Shihuang's Mausoleum Site Museum, Xi'an

CHINESE

Kneeling archer

Qin Dynasty 221–207 BCE
Emperor Qin Shihuang's Mausoleum Site Museum, Xi'an (002812)

(left)

Qin Shihuang's terracotta warriors, Pit 1
Qin dynasty 221–206 BCE (detail)
© Shaanxi History Museum (Shaanxi Cultural Heritage Promotion Center)
and Emperor Qin Shihuang's Mausoleum Site Museum