

## Monkeys Grasp for the Moon

Chinese artist Xu Bing created the hanging sculpture *Monkeys Grasp for the Moon* specifically for the stairwell of the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery. He based his design on a Buddhist folktale.

### The Folktale

One night, a group of monkeys in a tall tree saw the moon in a pool of water far below them. Thinking the moon had fallen from the sky, they wanted to scoop it up. The monkeys worked hard to link their arms and tails to form a long chain. Finally, the monkey at the bottom of the chain reached out to touch the moon in the water. He was surprised when the moon disappeared amid the shimmering ripples. Looking up, the monkeys saw the moon in the night sky. The one they had seen in the pool was just a reflection.

### Fun Fact

The 21 monkeys in the sculpture form a chain 80 feet long!

### Draw a Monkey

When Xu Bing pictured the folktale, he asked people to write down the word “monkey” in different languages. Then he turned the words into shapes that linked together, just like the monkeys did when they tried to catch the moon. Now it’s your turn to draw one. Pick a language for the word “monkey,” then use the letters to create arms, legs, a head, and a tail.

### Connect

Take a moment to learn more about contemporary artist Xu Bing and his artwork *Monkeys Grasp for the Moon*. Listen to Carol Huh, associate curator of contemporary Asian art, as she shares how the artwork was fabricated and later installed by Smithsonian Exhibits.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4-si0lc0Kmm>

Top: *Monkeys Grasp for the Moon*, S2004.2.1–21. Bottom: *Monkey and baby reaching for reflection of the moon*, S2003.8.1831.

