

## China Encounters

China Encounters is a column dedicated to sharing the experiences of visiting Swiss artists. Renowned caricaturist and speed painter **Corinne Sutter** shot to fame after demonstrating her artistic talents in *Switzerland's Got Talent* in 2016. Despite creating stunning portraits of two of the program's four judges, Corinne was initially eliminated before she could finish her work. She ultimately advanced to the next round of the competition, however, when judges saw her final piece and apologized. Her appearance on the show became a viral sensation, amassing hundreds of millions of views online and cementing her reputation as a speed painter.

Recently, Sutter appeared on China's popular talk show, *Day Day Up*, as part of a contingent of Swiss artists promoting their talents – and country – to Chinese viewers. In this issue of China Encounters, Sutter reveals her artistic vision and her experience working with Chinese TV show.

### Corinne Sutter: Chasing for speed



Corinne Sutter has established herself as a speed painting artist. © Ellen Mathys

**Swissnews:** How would you describe yourself as an artist and individual?

**Corinne Sutter:** I am a 32-year-old, all-round Swiss artist, working internationally as a speed painter since my performance on *Switzerland's Got Talent* went viral in 2016 and reached over 300 million viewers all over the world. I've worked as a freelance artist since I was 18. It's been my great aim to be fully free in what I do. I received my first jobs [via agents], which consisted of custom drawings, illustrations, and live caricatures at events such as weddings, fairs, and corporate functions.

I would describe myself as a very open-minded, communicative person full of ideas and visions for my life. I am easily bored and can't stand repetition.

**Swissnews:** Your specialty is speed painting. What makes this art form unique and what are some of your techniques?

**Corinne Sutter:** Speed painting is self-explanatory: it's painting at high speed! The painter is forced to reduce their subject to the most relevant lines. A speed painting performance on stage usually only takes a few minutes. My specialty is turning one subject into another, like a rebus painting. Apart from this, I experiment a lot with effects ranging from the glitter technique, which I demonstrated on *Switzerland's Got Talent*, to neon painting for glow-in-the-dark pieces. I can paint ambidextrously, upside down, and on two canvases.

**Swissnews:** What is the main theme you aim to convey through your artistic works?

**Corinne Sutter:** My aim is to express my thoughts and feelings through my art, to evoke and get to know the feelings and thoughts of other people. I want to talk about important subjects that bother me in a style that pleases me.

**Swissnews:** What recent major art projects have you participated in?

**Corinne Sutter:** I have done a BMW art car addressing the subject of climate change. This year I have done a Walt Disney Art show in Milano and painted [Irish pop singer] Ronan Keating before his concert at a pink ribbon charity night.

**Swissnews:** How would you describe your own approach? How have you developed your skills over the years?

**Corinne Sutter:** My career as a speed painter hasn't been as long as most people would think. The painting that I did on *Switzerland's Got Talent* had been my first attempt [of that kind]. After getting more and more requests from all over the world, I was motivated to establish myself as a speed painter. I improved my skills in this discipline by training to draw different famous faces, such as those of Amadeus Mozart, Albert Einstein, Salvador Dalí, and Roger Federer. During the process of training, there have been many ups and downs. At an album release concert, a stage was not covered well enough so the whole stage had to be polished after my act.

I am improving by learning more deeply about my subjects every time. In the beginning, I mostly had to paint over and over again. Increasingly, I'm able to learn the faces of subjects just by looking at a reference picture and memorizing the lines. What I concentrate on is not just learning shapes and lines, but also understanding what they mean. As I mostly paint on a black background, I paint negatively. Now, I profit from all the past faces I've trained on and use my knowledge of these subjects when studying a new one. For example, there is usually a shadow both under the nose and lower lip. These cause some odd lines around those important parts, yet make sense at the very end.

What also helps me is the musical tracks I've created over the last 18 months. They help me on stage not to lose speed, reminding me which step comes next. There is special sound effect for the most important parts, such as at the beginning, when I lift the velvet, and when I turn the painting.

**Swissnews:** What kind of creative patterns, routines, or rituals do you have?

**Corinne Sutter:** Even though I work nearly every day, I don't actually paint every day. Most mornings, I stay in bed with my surface tablet and do all the work related to communication. In the afternoon, I get more physically active and start sketching and planning new shows. In the evening, it's nearly impossible for me to stop painting once I start. It's the time when I get creative; ideas come into my head, probably because nobody disturbs me.

My most important ritual is keeping my mobile phone in a separate room while I paint. Another indispensable ritual is listening to audiobooks and podcasts during my work. I constantly listen to biographies about great personalities, such as Stephen Hawking, documentaries, and novels. Once I am in my working flow and the music is finished, I work in complete silence and forget everything. It's only the work that develops. I don't analyze it too much. I just go on with my mission and am oblivious to the indoor temperature or outdoor weather. I can easily work for periods spanning 12 or 15 hours without taking a break. Now, I am trying to work in shorter sessions as I am aware it's not healthy [to work for long periods] and in order to maintain a social life during the day.

**Swissnews:** Your performance on *Switzerland's Got Talent* introduced millions of viewers to your art. How has fame changed your life?



Sutter does speed painting with neon effect. © Swiss Innovation Forum

**Corinne Sutter:** My case is quite special. Many people have seen my video, so sometimes they just stare at me. When I read their faces, it seems they aren't sure where they recognize me from. Only at events do people talk to me directly about my TV appearance. I am glad because I don't want to talk about the show for the rest of my life.

What has really changed is that now I am a speed painter with many possibilities to work internationally! I never dared to dream that I could start this new career [following fame].

**Swissnews:** You recently took part in a very popular Chinese entertainment show, *Day Day Up* produced by Hunan TV. How did your appearance on *Day Day Up* come about?

**Corinne Sutter:** I received an email from the Embassy of Switzerland in China in which I'd been invited to take part in the show. I had been motivated to come to China from the beginning. I had a very tight schedule, but was convinced the great chance to perform in front of a bigger audience in China would be a unique experience.

**Swissnews:** It wasn't all smooth sailing, however. Your luggage was stranded in Paris when you arrived in China. How do you reflect on the overall experience, and can you offer a hint at what viewers can expect?

**Corinne Sutter:** It was quite a challenge. Apart from my missing baggage, my health wasn't great. In the end, I was happy to perform as I preferred to do so while half-sick than go home without doing any creative work. My painting combined two techniques I had never done simultaneously before, though I can't say too much before the broadcast [on 22nd of December].

**Swissnews:** What are the major differences between Chinese and Swiss TV production?

**Corinne Sutter:** I think TV always has some spontaneous component, but I had the impression that in Switzerland they would follow more to the schedule. I actually was quite surprised how much Chinese would improvise and just check the actual situation and decide what to do. Those decisions were taken very quickly. I also had the impression that some stage equipment was just created minutes before the show, but people weren't stressed out, they just blew up the balloons and smiled when they saw us watching.

What I see as a huge difference so far is the fact that [in China] I get to deal with many female professionals, while in Europe the business world is still rather male-dominated. So far, all of my [Chinese] contacts have been women. Another surprise is the age. I am aware that Chinese women often look younger than they sometimes are, but a female producer who had a lot to say on Day Day Up seemed to be around 20 years old. We Europeans shouldn't make the mistake of underestimating young Chinese women. They smile while working very hard. I have a lot of respect for them.

In both countries, directors are professional in their business of entertaining. They have their vision in mind and want guests to do as they wish. You have to accept that you will be directed to a certain point.

**Swissnews:** What are the difficulties working with Chinese partners in TV?

**Corinne Sutter:** It is very interesting to collaborate with Chinese people, but some cultural differences can create difficulties in our collaboration. One of them is the language. Sometimes we think we are talking about the same thing, but because neither side speaks English perfectly misunderstandings occur.

The channels of communication we use also differ. As I've only had two collaborations so far, of course I can't generalize. I get the impression that Chinese tend to use direct communication channels, such as WeChat or Facetime. I'm more used to writing one long email to answer all questions at once so I can concentrate on other work. Therefore, sometimes my emails don't get answered and other times I am not available to chat.



Sutter performs during the recording of the Day Day Up show. © Day Day Up

Sometimes I had contact with three or four Chinese people at once. I think Chinese people work more intensely as a group, while in Switzerland it's mostly one-to-one contact.

I appreciate that Chinese don't tend to watch the clock. Due to our time differences, my Chinese contacts and I worked during unusual office times. Usually I have to wait on weekends or evenings until I get an answer by an employee. However, when I arrived at Hunan TV at around 2 am, there were still directors around.

**Swissnews:** What are your future artistic plans? Do they involve returning to China?

**Corinne Sutter:** My plans are to become more authentic in my work, to talk about more distinguished subjects which I might express not just in paintings but also in words, maybe even music. For more serious subjects, I won't use the medium of speed painting or caricatures. I hope to find more time next to my custom work. Since I'm still building up my career as an international speed painter, and it is a progress that will take time.

I am convinced there is more artistic, interesting work awaiting me in China. I have heard there will be cultural exchanges between Switzerland and China the next years. If Chinese folks love what I do and want to see more, I will be there! I have also heard that a Chinese actor, Huang Xuan, was excited to receive a painting which sadly didn't work out this time for the delayed baggage. I hope to meet him in Switzerland or China to give him his painting – I already have an idea in mind!

*\*To learn more about Corinne Sutter and her performance videos, please visit: [www.corinnesutter.ch](http://www.corinnesutter.ch).  
To watch Corinne Sutter's performance in the Day Day Up show, please visit: [www.mgtv.com](http://www.mgtv.com).*