For the first time in its history, the City of Sydney has sought an artist to provide the overarching artistic vision for the development of a new public space, the ‘New Century Garden’ in Chinatown.

Contemporary Chinese-Australian artist Lindy Lee will lead the design team set to create a new public space in the heart of Sydney’s Chinatown.

In collaboration with design consultancy Urban Art Projects and the City’s design team of landscape architects, urban designers and technical experts, Lee will bring the ‘New Century Garden’ to life.

Under the City’s long-term public domain plan for Chinatown, part of the prominent Thomas Street is set to be closed to traffic and transformed into a pedestrian-friendly public plaza.
Lee will draw on the principles of Taoist and Buddhist philosophy to create a major new artistic space providing a contemporary interpretation of traditional Chinese gardens.

City of Sydney CEO Monica Barone said she was delighted an artist of Lindy’s calibre and experience would be involved in the City’s ‘New Century Garden’ on Thomas Street.

“In a city like Sydney, where public space is at a premium, it’s vital that our plazas and gardens are well-designed, reflecting their social, cultural and historical contexts,” Barone said.

“Chinatown is such an important part of Sydney – so making it a more enjoyable place to live, work and visit by putting people first is an absolute priority.

“We’re thrilled to have Lindy Lee, one of Australia’s foremost contemporary visual artists, onboard to guide the design of this new public space.

“I’m sure Lindy’s bold artistic vision and her dedication to helping us improve Chinatown will lead to the creation of a beautiful space that Sydneysiders and visitors alike will enjoy well into this century and the next.”

The idea of a ‘New Century Garden’ emerged from the City’s extensive community consultation in Chinatown, which identified the need for more open public spaces in the area.

Following the success of Jason Wing’s new artwork in Kimber Lane, Haymarket – In Between Two Worlds – the City decided to appoint another artist to lead the design direction for the improvements to Thomas Street and adjacent Hay Street.

The City’s Chinatown Public Art Curator, Aaron Seeto, last year hosted a forum of more than 60 artists, curators, writers and community members to discuss options for the development of the new public space.

Artists were invited to submit proposals responding to the ‘New Century Garden’ theme, with 27 submissions received from a wide range of emerging and established artists from across Australia. Lindy Lee’s proposal was selected from a shortlist of five.

Lee’s career as a visual artist has spanned more than three decades and seen her exhibit work across Australia, Asia, Europe and North America. She has been featured in the Biennale of Sydney, had a solo exhibition at the Sydney Opera House and held a residency at Red Gate Gallery in Beijing.

Lee is a founding member of Gallery 4A in Chinatown and has held positions with the Art Gallery of NSW, Australian Centre for Photography, Asian Australian Artists Association and Artspace. She currently holds the post of Senior Lecturer at the University of Sydney’s College of the Arts, and her work is held in nearly all of Australia’s major gallery collections.
Lee said she was deeply honoured to be selected to lead the artistic development.

“Chinatown holds a unique place in Australia’s cultural and social history, and through the Chinatown Public Domain Plan, the City of Sydney is acknowledging the importance of Australia’s Chinese community to the making of its national culture,” Lindy said.

“I envisage a garden which holds ancient Chinese spiritual values, experienced through an Australian landscape. Fire and water are important elements in Chinese Buddhism and Taoism – both denoting flow and change – and these symbols are also powerful symbols in Australia, given that our predominant experiences of nature are of fire and water – bushfire, flood and drought.”

The Chinatown Public Domain Plan is the City’s long-term vision for the transformation of Chinatown. Under the first stage of the plan, three laneways in the heart of Haymarket were given major facelifts earlier this year – Little Hay Street, Factory Street and Kimber Lane.

Detailed concept designs for the Thomas Street closure and improvements on adjacent Hay Street will be presented over the coming months, involving extensive community consultation.