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Sifang Art Museum is pleased to present the opening exhibition of a new project, *Levitation*, on July 22nd, 2022. The inaugural exhibition of this series comprises three paralleled projects by artists Guo Cheng, Lin Ke and Shi Zheng, and is on view through October 16th, 2022.

Over a long period of time, Sifang Art Museum has been dedicated to becoming a catalyst for the creative practices by Chinese contemporary artists. In response to the inadequate support for Chinese young artists during their career building process after debut, the museum has launched *Levitation* project to nurture emerging and mid-career Chinese artists who have been exploring the frontiers of art for more than five years. This project aims to offer support, in the form of museum programs, to help them deliver a holistic presentation or a challenging experiment about recent practices, and thus to pave the way for the next phase of their artistic creation.

In the summer of 2022, the first part of *Levitation* will focus on the increasingly entangled symbiosis between emerging technology and natural environment, as well as between human beings and the society. For the first time, the three floors of the museum space will be utilized by three representative Chinese artists who are original in the exploration of new media and contemporary technological thinking: Guo Cheng, Lin Ke and Shi Zheng, with each of them occupying an entire floor and presenting a total of three art projects simultaneously.

Guo Cheng's (b.1988) works often use humorous yet calm language to link grand issues with seemingly arbitrary objects and to provide critical perspectives for discussion. He obtained New Century Art Foundation "Art Production and Exhibition Support Program" (Beijing, 2022), Ars Electronica Honorary Mentions (Linz, 2020), the Digital Earth fellowship (The Hague, 2018-2019), the Special Jury Prize of Huayu Youth Award (Sanya, 2018).

As one of the representative artists from "Net Generation" in China, Lin Ke (b. 1984) employs his laptop as studio and liberates the unique poetry of digital interface through experimental Internet exploration and software manipulation. He won OCAT - Pierre Huber Art Prize in 2014 and the Chinese Youth Artist Award of the 9th AAC Art in 2015.

Shi Zheng (b. 1990) practices comprehensively over the range of audio-visual installations, digital music and live performance. Starting from simulation and "machine vision", he further embodies his reflection on the philosophy of technology, digital voyage and "latent time" by extending the

audience's visual and audio experience. He is also a member of artistic ground RMBit and performance group OSC (Open Super Control).

Surrounded by a natural/artificial environment constructed by remote mountains/forest farms, the Foshou Lake/reservoir and avant-garde architecture, these three projects, which are respectively modeled after the park, the art museum and the filming site, seem to reflect the three layers of the space where the museum is situated: the mountains, the sky and the lake. Meanwhile, this curatorial plan also resembles a multilayered dissection of a machine, cutting through the three levels of its hardware, interface and software.

Special thanks to the artists, Nanjing Pukou Culture & Tourism Development Group, Sifang Cultural Group, and all participating parties who have generously supported this exhibition.

## **Guo Cheng**

### ***The Park***

This is a park. Here, visitors will see the inner structure of nature. Radiation emanated into the air, and geological strata that have been mined, it probes human traces beneath the natural surface in search of any physical evidence that records the entanglement between human beings and nature. Perhaps, we can also call it a dissection installation of nature.

Guo Cheng has long contemplated the impact of technology on human beings and the environment, especially the ones whose effects far exceed the physical capacity of human beings. Based on the remnants of those technologies, geologists of our time have declared Anthropocene as an official subdivision of geologic time. In this new era, it not only means that human power can match that of the ocean, the Earth crust and the monsoon, but also implies that men cannot have full control over their own creation—technology used to be a means of monitoring nature into a homeostasis that is similar to the skeleton or a thermostatic system, but now we cannot evade the metabolic dysfunction which is shown in the offset of effect from its original purpose.

It is under this context that Guo Cheng's park captures the reality of the technology this day: technology is an external survival system for human beings, and at the same time an object independent of people. If we strive to understand the ultimate meaning of technology under this context, then we must imagine a perspective far beyond the scope of humans in order to observe the origin of technology and the totality of its aftereffects.

Hence, we shall say that this park is not a park designed for humans. What it shows is an absolute presence of technological products. All the physical evidence that has outlived human existence—the waiting for the radioactive waste emitted from nuclear tests of the last century to decay back to a nature level, or the construing of an object covered by cement as a crystalized amber in the future—points to an epistemological dilemma: how should we approach the technological products on a

cosmic timescale after human's absence? Meanwhile, as technology of the contemporary age is shifting towards an almost a priori, intelligent-agency mode of development, the aforementioned epistemological dilemma likewise exists in a non-empiricist origin: once human beings are no longer able to measure the actual potential of technology (for its mechanism and aftermath) through their application, then technology seems to become a mysterious, absurd and catch-22 situation to us.

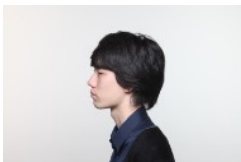
There stands the “oracle” installation at the entrance of the park, consisting of a real random number generator that reacts to ionizing radiation, a twisted “sculpture” that is made of photos processed by artificial intelligence, a windmill base that is hard to tell whether it is being dismantled or built—they are located outside of the field of meaning, in a barren yet self-consistent space.

This is a park. If the visitor takes a bird's-eye view from above, then they will realize that its landscape takes inspiration from the patterns of a butterfly. But the park itself does not prompt such a viewing perspective. The reason lies in the normalcy of human beings, that we are constantly only one step behind our terminal goal, in need of that one last permission or technology to close the remaining distance.

Text by Huang Pojan

## About Artist

Guo Cheng



Guo Cheng (b. 1988) is an artist currently lives and works in Shanghai. He was graduated from MA Design Products at Royal College of Art (London, UK) and obtained his BE in Industrial Design at Tongji University (Shanghai, China). His practice mainly focuses on exploring the interrelation between mainstream/emerging technologies and individuals under the context of culture and social life. In recent years, his practice has dealt with themes such as the Anthropocene and Second Nature, digitalized interobjectivity, and infrastructures and ideologies behind. Guo Cheng's works often use humorous yet calm plastic language, linking grand issues with seemingly arbitrary objects, and providing critical perspectives for discussion and imagination.

His recent solo exhibitions include: *Almost Unmeant*, Magician Space, Beijing, China (2020); *Down to Earth*, Canton Gallery, Guangzhou, China (2019). Major group exhibitions include: *Order Copied: Changing the Reference Frame*, Magician Space, Beijing, China(2022); *BOOMERANG—OCAT Biennale 2021*, OCAT Shenzhen, Shenzhen, China (2021); *Spinning East Asia Series I: A Compass in Hand*, Centre for Heritage, Arts and Textile, Hong Kong, China(2021); *Machine Learning Human Dreams*, Deutsches Hygiene-Museum, Dresden, Germany (2021);

*Disenchantment, Exploded View, Glider vs. Airplane*, G Museum, Nanjing (2021); *We=Link: Sideways*, A Chronus Art Center (CAC), Shanghai (2020); *How Do We Begin?*, X Museum, Beijing, China (2020); *The Eternal Network* (exhibition of Transmediale 2020), HKW, Berlin, Germany (2020); *The Process of Art: TOOLS AT WORK*, Power Station of Art, Shanghai, China (2019); *Notes from Pallet Town*, UCCA Dune, Qinhuangdao, China (2019); *Deja vu*, Today Art Museum, Beijing, China (2019); *Open Codes. Connected Bots*, Chronus Art Center, Shanghai, China (2019); *Free Panorama*, Pingshan Culture Center, Shenzhen, China (2019); *Tracing the Mushroom at the End of the World*, Taikang Space, Beijing, China (2019); *Shanghai Beat*, Contemporary Art Museum, Kumamoto, Japan (2018); *Machines Are Not Alone: A Mechanic Trilogy*, Chronus Art Center, Shanghai (2018) etc..

He obtained New Century Art Foundation “Art Production and Exhibition Support Program” (Beijing, 2022); 2020-2021 Porsche “Young Chinese Artist of the Year” (Shanghai, 2021); Ars Electronica Honorary Mentions (Linz, 2020); CAC://DKU Research & Creation Fellowship (Shanghai, 2020); STARTS Prize Nomination (Linz, 2020); the Digital Earth fellowship (2018-2019); the Special Jury Prize of Huayu Youth Award (Sanya, 2018); the Bio-Art & Design Award, The Hague (2017).

## **Lin Ke**

### ***Xifang Art Museum***

In the sun-drenched upper gallery of Sifang Art Museum, Lin Ke is building a floating “Xifang Art Museum” with his signature “sky paintings” and site-specific wallpapers extending into a virtual space.

“Sky paintings” employ Photoshop’s transparent gradient feature to layer and sample digital reproductions of classical paintings. Through methods like drawing, curving, spraying, and digital printing, the layers are transferred to various types of reflective, transparent materials, thereby slicing and “replicating” the virtual using the concrete, letting a digital “sense of light” converge with light in the real world.

Entering the gallery, the audience will walk through an aisle that is translucent on one side. The opposing wall displays “transparent” paintings, as well as a retreating space created by the illusory wallpapers. When facing these paintings, the audience will notice that sunlight comes from behind, while a “virtuality delineated by materiality” unfolds in front. The transparency of the materials used, silhouette of the sunlight filtered by the audience’s shadows, and intentional low saturation all make the works oscillate between the “concrete” and the “virtual.” Immersed in natural light, the “light” and “transparency” concocted by digital techniques confront the source of light and transparency that we are most familiar with—the sky—and become an existence infinitely approaching the boundary between virtuality and reality.

*Xifang Art Museum* displays common themes in Western art and works created with the Western tool of Photoshop. It is, however, not directed toward the West in a sociopolitical or technological sense; rather, it is a remnant of the Western experience. Images of a SketchUp model of the entire exhibition are suspended along a French window, serving as the exhibition guide and at the same time, a visual reminder that *Xifang Art Museum* is situated in “transparency” of Sifang Art Museum.

## About Artist

Lin Ke



Born in Zhejiang, China in 1984; graduated from the New Media Art Department of The China Academy of Art in 2008. Currently lives in Shanghai and Hangzhou, China.

Since 2010, Lin Ke has turned his attention to the behavioral science of the computer age by making himself his own Guinea pig. Converting his laptop into a studio, Lin extracts material from computer software and the Internet as the fodder and form of his art. The mundane act of exploring the vicissitudes of the world wide web and various applications becomes the catalyst for art making and self-portraiture. He records operational behavior and conceptual images by using screenshots and screen recording software. His work takes the form of installation, image, sound, text, video and computer painting.

In his work, Lin Ke uses software to set its various functions free from their original purpose in the way that language is liberated from its communicative functions to become poetic. If poetry expresses the joy of language, Lin Ke’s work brings out the pleasure of the graphical user interface.

Lin Ke has gained major critical acclaim for his work by winning the OCAT - Pierre Huber Art Prize in 2014, and the Chinese Youth Artist Award of the 9th AAC Art 2015. His work has been shown at ZKM, Karlsruhe; Museum Folkwang, Essen; Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo, Tokyo; Minsheng Art Museum, Shanghai, Museum of Contemporary Art Cleveland; Centre for Chinese Contemporary Art, Manchester, and Ikon Gallery, Birmingham. His work is featured in the collections of The Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; M+ Museum of Visual Culture, HK; K11 Art Foundation, HK; KADIST Foundation, Paris/San Francisco; New Century Art Foundation, Beijing; Power Station of Art, Shanghai; White Rabbit Museum, Sydney and among others.

## **Shi Zheng**

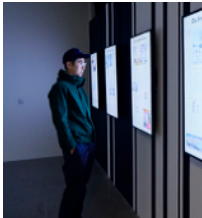
### ***Slothful Machine***

Slothfulness is a self-conscious gesture of incomplete existence, a status similar to dehydration, where one seems to be partially engaged with but also partially detached from the here and now. The slothful status is akin to a controlled free fall too, during which process one's agency is compromised. Imitation, on the other hand, is also a slothful behavior. A new skill oftentimes develops from imitative slothfulness, but then levels up thanks to the expansion of consciousness. As a result, imitative learning can also be considered as the beginning of one's consciousness raising.

*Slothful Machine* exhibits a series of the artist's representative works from recent years. The title, *Slothful Machine*, which denotes the artist's constant interest in computer vision, face recognition, simulation and artificial intelligence, is a hypothesis which he proposed specifically for this exhibition, in the hope that the audience could adopt an alternative perspective to view it and realize that perhaps the slothfulness of machine represents its limited intelligence, or perhaps the machines appeared in his works and the machines making these works are slacking off, when they only keep repeating their imitation of things and events that have happened in reality.

### **About Artist**

Shi Zheng



Shi Zheng (born in 1990) is an artist based in Shanghai. Shi's artistic creations range from audio-visual installations, digital music and live performance, demonstrating the artist's ongoing interest in simulation and "machine vision". Shi further embodies his reflection on the philosophy of technology, digital voyage and "latent time" by extending the audience's visual and audio experience.

Apart from individual creation, Shi Zheng also collaborates with other outstanding artists in various fields. In 2013, artistic ground RMBit was founded by Shi Zheng in conjunction with Nenghuo, Wang Zhipeng and Weng Wei with the focus on current context of social media. Both Shi and Nenghuo are the members of an audio-visual performance group OSC (Open Super Control). Shi Zheng's individual and cooperated works have been presented in a wide range of museums, art institutions and media art festivals home and abroad, including TANK Shanghai, MOCA Yinchuan, Sound Art China, FILE Electronic Language International Festival, Ars Electronica, Institute of

Contemporary Arts London, Castello di Rivara, The Lumen Prize, Shanghai 21st Century Minsheng Art Museum and OCT Contemporary Art Terminal Shenzhen.

Shi Zheng holds a B.A. from China Academy of Art and an MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago.