



UNSW
SYDNEY

IN-/VISIBLE SPECTRUMS

Contemporary Video Art from the Sinosphere

SOAS Gallery 2026

In-/Visible Spectrums: Contemporary Video Art from the Sinosphere

不-/可见的光谱：华语文化圈当代影像艺术



SOAS Gallery, University of London
Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG

Thursday 16 April – Saturday 20 June 2026

Exhibition produced and financially supported by the **University of New South Wales Judith Neilson Chair of Contemporary Art (JNCCA)**.



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Artists

Huang Yuhui 黄宇辉
Li Nu 李怒
Liang Yue 梁玥
Liu Guoqiang 刘国强
Ma Haijiao 马海蛟
Ma Qiusha 马秋莎
Siu Wai Hang 萧伟恒
Tong Wenmin 童文敏
Xin Yunpeng 辛云鹏
Yi Lian 易连
Zheng Xinhao 郑新皓

Curators

Paul Gladston 葛思谛
Lynne Howarth-Gladston
Yique 一鹤
Lin Zi 林梓
Frank Vigneron

Project Manager

Chen Wen 陈雯

Graphic Designer

Xueliang Deng 邓学良

Additional Design Work

Akshata Iyer

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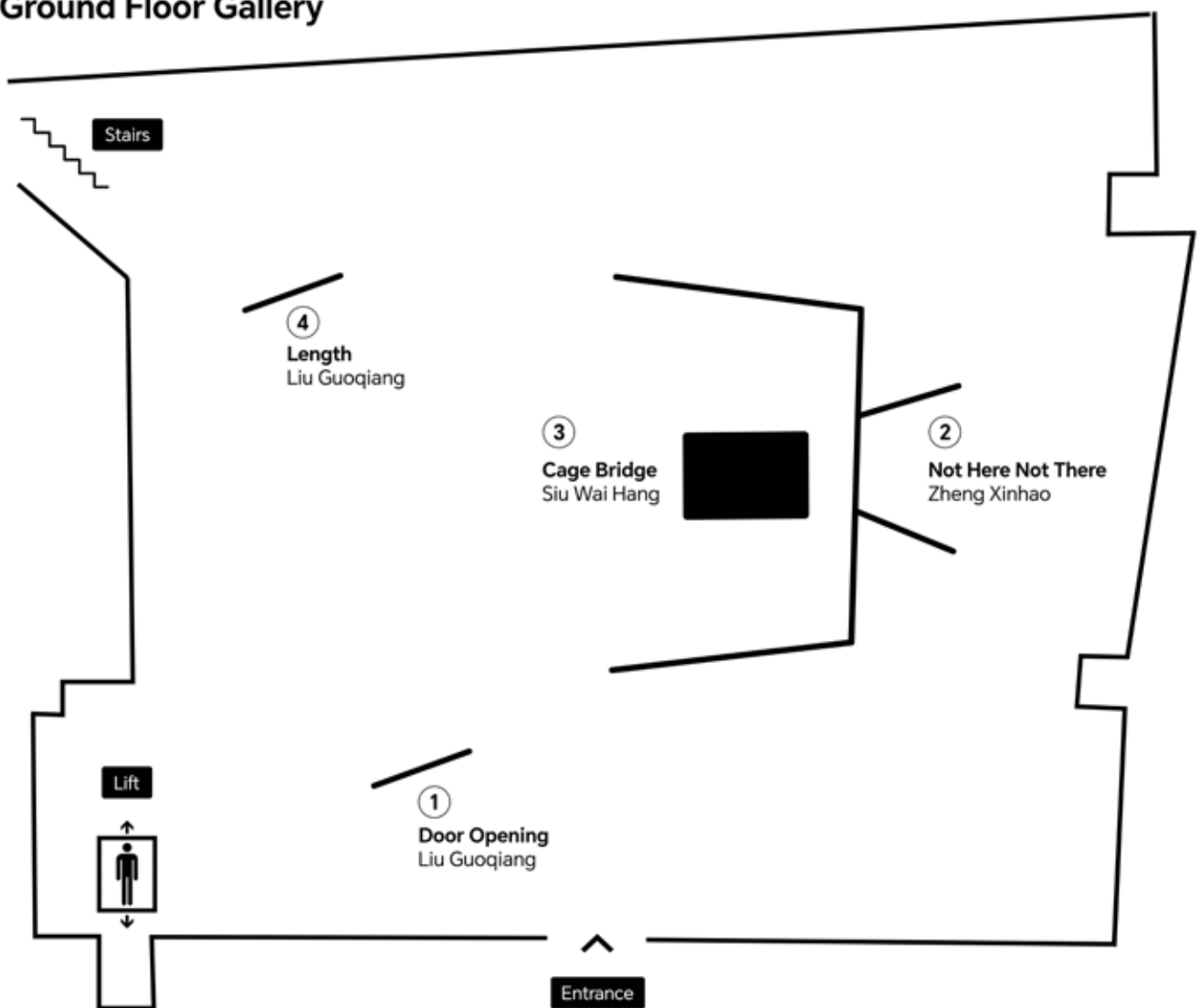
For more information

Please visit our website at unsw.to/Invisiblespectrums

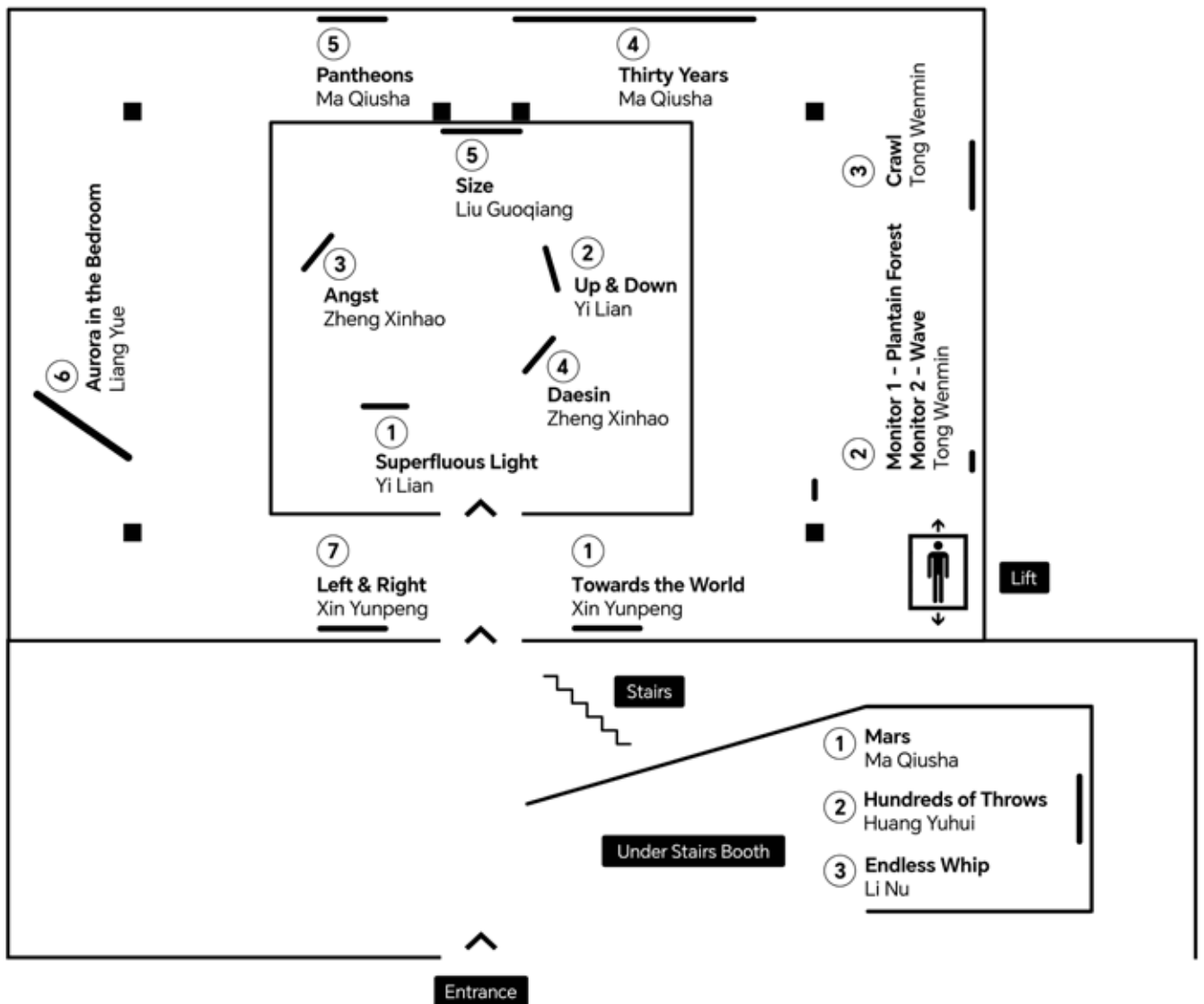
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Exhibition Floor Maps

Ground Floor Gallery



Basement Gallery



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TV Monitor - Documentary on wall.
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First Floor Garden

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Introduction

Paul Gladston and Lynne Howarth-Gladston

This online catalogue accompanies the exhibition 'In-/Visible Spectrums: Contemporary Video Art from the Sinosphere' which was staged at the SOAS Gallery, University of London from the 16 April - 20 June 2026. The exhibition showcased works by 11 Sinophone artists: Huang Yuhui 黄宇辉, Li Nu 李怒, Liang Yue 梁玥, Liu Guoqiang 刘国强, Ma Haijiao 马海蛟, Ma Qiusha 马秋莎, Siu Wai Hang 萧伟恒, Tong Wenmin 童文敏, Xin Yunpeng 辛云鹏, Yi Lian 易连 and Zheng Xinhao 郑新皓.

The exhibition's curatorial team was led by Professor Paul Gladston, the University of New South Wales Judith Neilson Chair of Contemporary Art (UNSW JNCCA), and Dr. Lynne Howarth-Gladston, an independent curator, artist and art writer. Co-curators include the artist Yique and the art writer Lin Zi - both based in mainland China - and Professor Frank Vigneron of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. 'In-/Visible Spectrums' builds on two previous exhibitions of contemporary video art from the Sinosphere curated by Gladston and Howarth-Gladston: 'Dis-/Continuing Traditions- Contemporary Video Art from China' staged at the Salamanca Arts Centre Hobart, Australia in 2021 and 'New China/New Art-Contemporary Video from Shanghai and Hangzhou' staged at the Djanogly Gallery, University of Nottingham UK in 2015.

The Sinosphere is considered by the curators to be a cultural-linguistic rather than a strictly geographical domain extending across the geopolitical boundaries of mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and related diasporic communities worldwide.① Videos included in 'In-/Visible Spectrums' were produced since 2015 by Sinophone artists living and working in mainland China in addition to one from mainland China currently located in Canada and another from Hong Kong now in the UK. The Sinosphere is not a culturally or linguistically monolithic domain despite the predominant use of Putonghua (simplified Chinese) within mainland China and globally across the Chinese-speaking world in addition to the sharing of a sociocultural habitus rooted in Sinophone classical tradition by Chinese communities worldwide. Rather, it encompasses diverse but interrelated cultural outlooks, languages and dialects. The internal geopolitical divisions of the Sinosphere are, of course, heavily contested - with Beijing claiming sovereignty over a so-called 'Greater China' incorporating mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, and others inside and outside the Sinosphere rejecting that claim. The (notional) limits of the Sinosphere are, moreover, increasingly fluid considering the intensified global movement of Chinese speaking peoples as part of the unfolding of post-Cold War globalisation. The identification of an extended Sinosphere recognises the diverse trans-/cultural specificity of 'Chinese' contemporary art while also intervening critically with unjustifiable claims of cultural and sociopolitical essentialism.

Videos selected for inclusion in 'In-/Visible Spectrums' tend toward the lyrical, conceptually abstract, poetic and indeterminately disjunctive. From the point of view of current international artworld sensibilities - with their renewed (post-deconstructivist) emphasis on ideologically partisan oppositional messaging - such works may seem lacking in critical significance, both aesthetically and politically. However, when interpreted from the standpoint of sociopolitical and cultural conditionalities across the Sinosphere that is far from being the case. Artistic production, reception and display within the People's Republic of China (PRC) - including mainland China and the Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong after the imposition of the so-called National Security Law there by Beijing in 2020 - are subject to pervasive state controls on freedom of public expression; of which the general population including artists are only too aware, albeit without a definitive understanding of where the limits of transgression may lie. Artists are nevertheless able to signify oblique/encoded - and therefore, eminently deniable - criticism of cultural, social and political authority resonant, as the essay by Gladston, Howarth-Gladston, Lin and Yique included in this catalogue makes clear, with similar strategies adopted historically by painters and poets in the pre-modern Chinese dynastic-imperial state.

Modern and contemporary art in Taiwan was subject for many decades to a localised sociocultural and political conservatism that has only recently given way (in part) to a diverse multi-cultural democratic liberalism comparable to some extent with that in European/American and other Westernised states. Under those changed conditions, cultural self-reflexivity and outward facing sociopolitical criticism have become better established aspects of the public sphere. Diasporic artists have often left geographical China in search of greater cultural freedoms only to find localised restrictions on artistic freedom alongside ingrained anti-Chinese sentiments. While dominant discourses in European/American and Westernised liberal democracies uphold the post-Enlightenment ideal of free artistic expression, in practice that ideal is heavily qualified by legal and institutionalised limits, not least in recent years the chilling effects of political correctness on the right and left. Indeed, the installation of artistic criticality as a norm in those contexts arguably recuperates any meaningful impact on authority.

In all Sinospheric contexts the making of lyrical, conceptually abstract and poetic art is not only resonant with classical Chinese high-cultural aesthetics, its semiotic indeterminacy and evocation of diverse and shifting feelings also serve to elude any controlling categorization. Arguably, the Sinosphere's boundaries gradate to

touch on non-'Chinese' artists conversant to varying degrees with Sinophone culture. Works by such artists are not included in 'In-/Visible Spectrums' but may be in future exhibitions staged by the present curators regarding art from the Sinosphere.

The videos included in 'In-/Visible Spectrums' were selected following face-to-face and online meetings with artists in various locations across mainland China - Shanghai, Hangzhou, Shenzhen and Beijing - conducted by three of the exhibition's curators - Paul Gladston, Yique and Lin Zi - from June to August 2025. Research for the exhibition also encompassed discussions between Gladston and Professor Frank Vigneron of the Chinese University of Hong Kong in April 2025 in addition to related meetings at the Delfina Foundation in London between Gladston and two artists from Hong Kong in September 2025. There was also an online meeting between Gladston and the Chinese Canadian artist whose work is included in 'In-/Visible Spectrums' in July 2025. The curatorial selection of videos for the SOAS exhibition is intended to present viewers with a degree of thematic coherence. It also reflects the long-standing aesthetic interests of the exhibition's lead curators. Less conceptually abstract, lyrical and poetic videos were seen as part of the research for 'In-/Visible Spectrums' and may be included in future exhibitions.

A closed three-day screening of videos and discussion panels related to 'In-/Visible Spectrums' titled 'Absent Participation-Moving Images as Art' was staged at the Creativity and Innovation Center, Longgang District, Shenzhen City, China between 29 and 31 Aug 2025. That event was organised by Yique in association with the UNSW Judith Neilson Chair of Contemporary Art, WeArt and the Longcheng Creativity Community. In Yique's words, 'Our intention in curating this screening was not to construct a unified "picture of video art in China," but rather to gather: to bring together a group of artists willing to continue speaking, observing, and expressing within complex circumstances. Their moving images are not intended simply to "narrate realities" but to disturb them.'^② Videos screened at 'Absent Participation' were presented in three categories: 'Poetic', 'Endurance' and 'Provocation'. As Yique indicates, video art from mainland China across all those categories involves diverse forms of 'disruptive' formal and semiotic obliqueness. Public screenings of the work of four video artists from mainland China and two related discussion panels curated by Paul Gladston with Yique and Lin Zi were staged as part of an art and design festival at the Sea World Culture and Arts Center (SWCAC), Shenzhen on 21-27 November 2025. 'In-Visible

Spectrums' was accompanied by a series of screenings/panel discussions at SOAS between April and June 2026 featuring some of the videos in and others not selected for the exhibition.

In addition to this introduction, the present online catalogue contains artist's biographies and notes on their artworks in addition to the essay by Gladston, Howarth-Gladston, Lin and Yique. That essay aims to present an innovative interpretative matrix taking into account the differing localised conditionalities of contemporary video art across the Sinosphere in intersection with the transcultural construction of Sinophone contemporary art more generally^③ as well as questions of sociopolitical engagement and disengagement. The significance of which is not intended to be authoritative but open to unfolding readings regarding changing circumstances of time and place as well as active re-/interpretation by readers.

This openness to parallax trans-historical and cultural interpretation is reflected in the title 'In-/Visible Spectrums.' An extended print catalogue including individual critical essays by Lin Zi, Nan Li and Frank Vigneron will be published after the closing of the exhibition.

^①The term 'Sinosphere' has been used previously but without explicit reference to Sinophone diasporas.

^②See, <https://www.unsw.edu.au/arts-design-architecture/jncca/news-and-events/events/absent-participation-moving-images-as-art>

^③Contemporary Art across the Sinosphere is shaped generally by transcultural intersections between thinking and practice characteristic of European/American avant-garde modernist, postmodernist and contemporary art and aspects of localised Chinese culture. Such intersections are part of a longer relay of transculturality between China, Europe/America and Westernised contexts constitutive of modernity in each of those locations since the seventeenth century.



Huang Yuhui 黄宇辉

1998 - Born in Changzhou, China.

2022 - MA Design, Goldsmiths, University of London.

2024 - MFA Fine Art, Glasgow School of Art.

Lives and works in Chengdu, China.

Huang's inclined creative approach is a combination of visual and behavioural performances. He yearns to break time through creative practice. The break in time can lead to the madness of time, loosening the chain of language and allowing the reality that exists under the shadow of daily language to flow out of the break. Huang states, 'We are always unexpectedly unsettled by real things, probably because when faced with familiar things, we prefer to "memorize" rather than "read". The joy brought by recitation is suspended, dry and devoid of moisture, to the extent that it can ascend to the eternal constellation above. And what I want to convey is the internal deviation of the stars, squeezing some water into happiness!'



Hundreds of Throws (2023), single-channel video, 05'20"



Endless Whip (2019), single-channel video, colour, sound, 08'17"

Li Nu's work is rooted in everyday life. He subverts the perceived boundaries between documentary and fiction, representation and abstraction to explore and achieve a poetic language in art. By capturing the details of everyday life, he aims to reflect individuals' mood swings and the mundane state of the population within the evolution of macro-society. The apparently unpromising materials of everyday life are transformed into something metaphorical, poignant, humorous, poetic and dramatic, challenging us to question our received experiences about life and see the world afresh. The concept he aims to express is never what you have seen; it is always wandering between void and solid.



Li Nu 李怒

1979 - Born in Sichuan province, China.
2015 - MA in Sculpture, Royal College of Art, London, UK.

Lives and works in Beijing, China.

Liang Yue 梁玥

1979 - Born in Shanghai.

2001 - Graduated from Shanghai Art Academy.

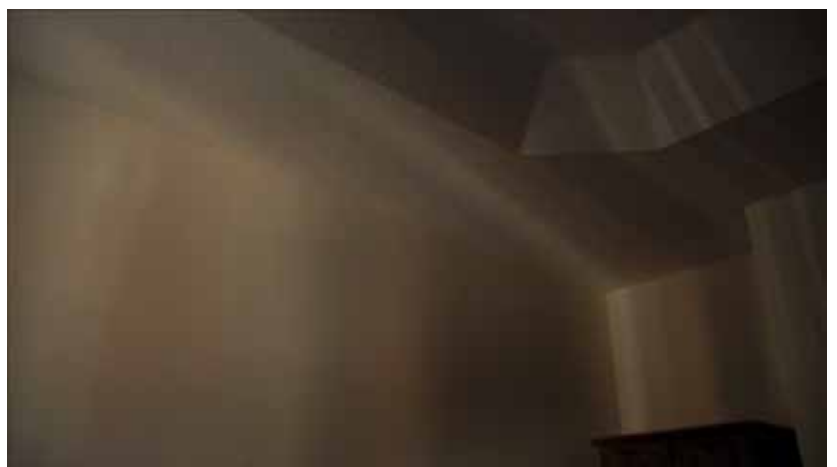
Lives and works in Toronto, Canada.



In Liang Yue's work – whether in the form of photos or videos – the 'daily' is always taken as a focus. She uses readily available materials to seek, explore and capture daily routines and to gaze at the eternal scenery in nature by extending the forms of urban life. A clear indicator of her art practice can be witnessed in works during the past fifteen years that explore the beauty of insignificance; especially her videos, in which she continues to simplify and abandon the conventional techniques of shooting and editing as a way of challenging the art appreciation which the audience has been used to as well as viewers' patience and rationality. The so-called significance and value of art is brought into question by treating the meaningless as the ultimate sign of creation.



Mind Rehearsal (2018), single-channel video, colour, sound, HD, 26'37"



Aurora in the Bedroom (2020), single-channel video, colour, no sound, 4K, 13'00"



Liu Guoqiang 刘国强

1988 - Born in Shandong Province, China.

2011 - Graduated from the China Academy of Art, Hangzhou, China.

His works encompass video, installation, and painting.



Doors Opening (2015), two-channel video, 0'45"
Length (2015), two-channel video, 0'25"



Size (2019), single-channel video, 4'11"



Light from the Sun (2023-2024), single channel video, color, sound, 10'35"

Ma Haijiao's artistic media include documentary video, photography, video installations, text, and paintings. His works explore personal thoughts and sensitivities about immediate environments as well as broader societal and historical contexts. Works are created from personal experience and close observation of everyday life, which are used to develop a visual language that blends the appearance of reality with poetic elements.

Ma Haijiao 马海蛟

1990 - Born in Hebei Province, China.

2009 - 2016 - BA and MA, China Academy of Art, Hangzhou, China.

Lives and works in Beijing.



1982 - Born in Beijing, China.

2005 - BA, Digital Media Studio, Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, China.

2008 - MFA Electronic Integrated Art, Alfred University, New York, US.

Lives and works in Beijing, China.

Ma Qiusha employs multiple media including photography, video, installation and drawing to explore experiences of life under sociocultural transformations. Often using intimate visual languages, her work addresses the themes of individuals and the collective as well as private spaces and public spheres. Drawing on an anthropological perspective, her research on individuals, families and intergenerational relationships raises questions of appearance and disappearance, and of the truth or mistruth of history.



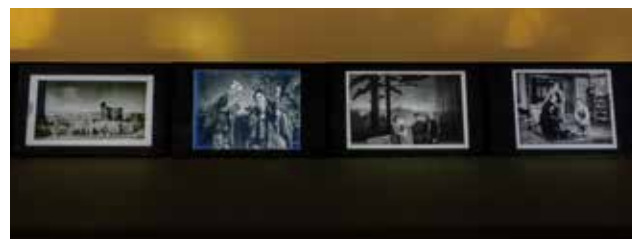
Ma Qiusha 马秋莎



Mars (2016), single channel video, 3'53"



Pantheon (2024-2025), multi-screen video, colour, sound, 0'40"



Thirty Years (2025), 30-channel video installation, colour, sound, multiple durations up to 1'00"



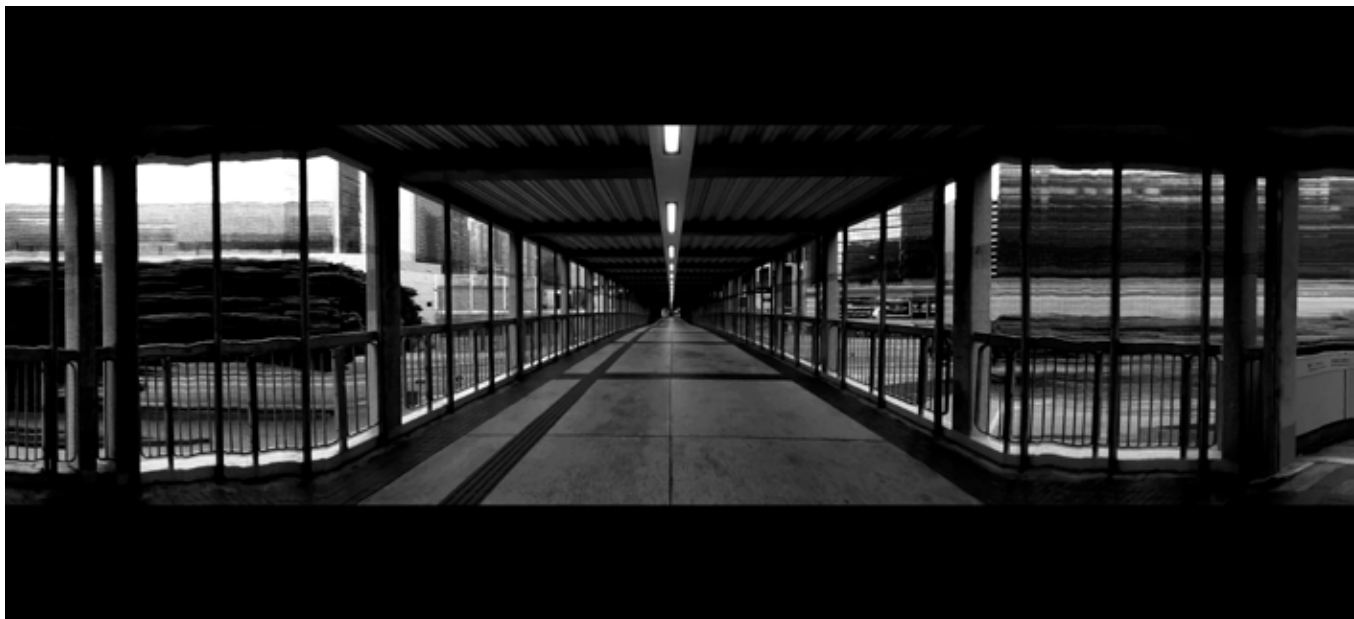
Siu Wai Hang 蕭偉恒

1986 - Born in Hong Kong, China.

2013 - Master of Fine Arts, Department of Fine Arts, The Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Lives and works in the UK.

Siu Wai Hang's work uses different methods and principles to express solicitude for society and contemplation on the medium of photography. History is the thread through which a worldview of being a Hong Konger is uncovered. Subject matter couples with the nature and strength of photography highlighting encounters between traditional photography and contemporary digital work.



Cage Bridges (2021), video sculpture, 42'00"



Wave (2019), single-channel video, colour, no sound, 19'46"



Tong Wenmin 童文敏

1989 - Born in Chongqing, China.

2012 - Graduated from Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, Chongqing, China.

Lives and works in Chongqing, China.



Crawl (2018-2019), three-channel video, colour, sound, 22'48", 19'55", 25'02"



Plantain Forest (2019), single-channel video, colour, sound, 6'43"

Tong Wenmin's work often focuses on the intersection between individual perception and the external environment, stimulating visual poetry and inspiring action through behaviours that at first seem counter-intuitive. Her work hints at the allegorical character of the body and action within a semantically rich context.



Xin Yunpeng 辛云鹏

1982 - Born in Beijing, China.

2007 - BFA Sculpture Department at the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing.

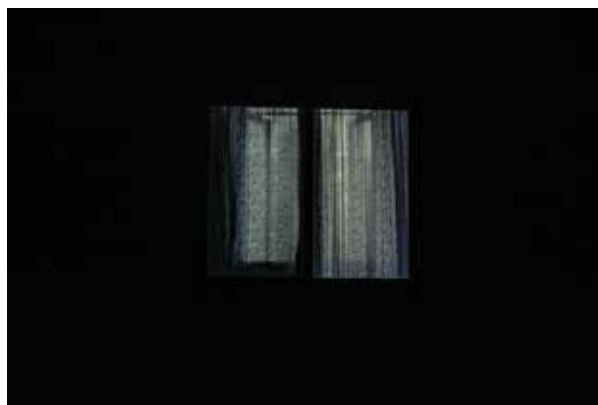
2016 - Master of Art degree.

Lives and works in Beijing, China.

Xin Yunpeng's work primarily takes the form of installations, video pieces, and site-specific projects. His art raises questions about the social realities around us, marked by a sharp sensitivity and political metaphor. He integrates his ideas—sometimes forcefully, sometimes subtly—into practices that regard the present as living history. Whether through manipulating the physical dimensions of space, exploring time and irony in moving images, or appropriating found objects, Xin Yunpeng's artistic practice provokes a psychological "counteraction" in viewers that emerges from specific contexts.



Towards the World (2022), ten-screen video installation, LED screen, media player board, variable dimensions, 3'00" (loop)



Left and Right, Hesitation (2017), two-channel video, 1920*1080 25p, 16:9, colour, sound, variable dimensions, 10'43" (loop)

Yi Lian 易连

1987 - Born in Jiangxi Province, China.

2009 - BA, New Media Art Department,
China Academy of Art, Hangzhou.

2012 - MA, School of Intermedia Art,
China Academy of Art, Hangzhou.

Lives and works in Hangzhou, China.



Yi Lian's creative forms include video, installation, photography, painting, and ceramics. His works are primarily based on contemporary Chinese reality and focus on the concrete and authentic personal spiritual state.



Up and Down (2022), single-channel video, colour, sound, 4K, 9'00"



Superfluous Light (2020), single-channel video, colour,
sound, 4K, 4'19"



Zheng Xinhao 郑新皓

1996 - Born in Lanzhou, Gansu, China.

2016 - 2020 - BA in Public Art, Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts, Public Art Department, Xi'an, China.

2021 - 2024 - MFA, Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts, Department of Transmedia Art, Xi'an, China.

2024-present - PhD, Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts, Department of Transmedia Art, Xi'an, China.

Lives and works in Xi'an, Shaanxi, China.

Zheng Xinhao's practice spans moving image and installation, employing interdisciplinary approaches to engage with themes of history, ecology, and subjectivity. His works navigate the tensions between existential anxiety, death awareness, and identity formation, tracing the continual transformation of "the meaning of meaning" as a core narrative thread. He is currently a Ph.D. candidate in Public Art within the Department of Cross-Media Art at the Xi'an Academy of Fine Arts, and founded the COMMON art collective in 2021.



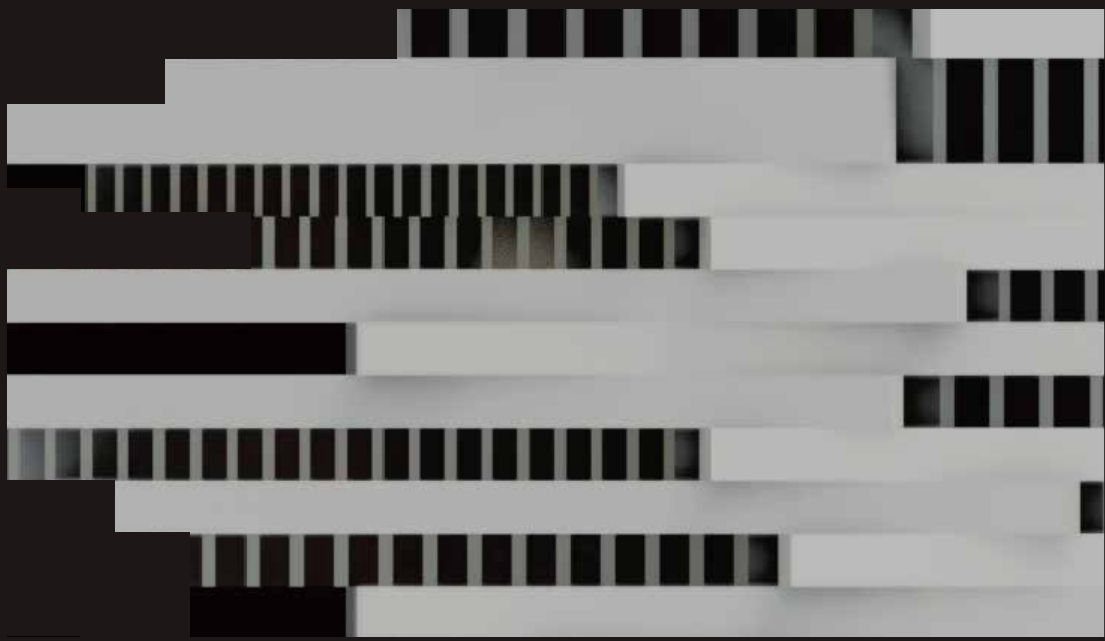
Dasein (2021), two-channel video, colour, sound, 4'25"



Angst (2021), multi-screen video, 3'00"



Not Here, Not There (2020), single-channel video, 6'14"



**Ten
Critical-interpretative
Notes on the Exhibition
'In-/Visible Spectrums:
Contemporary Video
Art from the
Sinosphere'**

Paul Gladston, Lynne Howarth-Gladston, Lin Zi and Yique

IN-/ VISIBLE SPECTRUMS

I

Video was initially adopted as an artistic medium in mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan during the 1980s. The first video installation produced in Taiwan was by the artist Kuo I-Fen in 1983. Early exponents of the medium in Hong Kong include Ellen Pau, whose first single-channel video *Disenchantment of the Statue* was shown there in 1987. Pau co-founded Videotage, Hong Kong's locally groundbreaking video artist collective and archive for media art in 1986. Zhang Peili produced mainland China's first video artwork, *30x30* in 1988 using a Betamax camera borrowed from local customs officials. Zhang founded the New Media Department at Hangzhou's prestigious China Academy of Art in 2003 where he taught numerous intakes of video and new media students until his retirement from full-time work as an academic in 2020.

Video artworks by artists of Chinese identity in Europe and America are yet to be fully documented. *Chinese Memory*, produced by David Liu in 1985, may be one of the earliest significant examples in the US. Other artists of Chinese identity who have made video artworks in the US include George K. Chung and W.T. Chan. The first video artwork shown in the US by an artist from mainland China is likely to have been the installation *The Sky of Brooklyn* by Wang Gongxin in 1995.

The development of video art by artists of Chinese identity has up until recently been strongly eclipsed by the work of the Korean born artist Nam June Paik, considered widely to be the 'father' of contemporary video art. Nam presented his first significant 'video' works at the exhibition, 'Exposition of Music-Electronic Television' staged in West Germany in 1963. The first non-Asian makers of video art working during the 1960s include Wolf Vostell, Bruce Nauman, and Joan Jonas.

II

It is possible to conceive of the production, display and reception of video by artists of Chinese identity as taking place not simply within different nation states but also across a globally extensive Sinophone cultural-linguistic domain traversing the borders of the mainland People's Republic of China (PRC), Hong Kong, Taiwan and related diasporic communities. That domain – referred to here as the Sinosphere – is diverse not only culturally and linguistically but also politically. It is nevertheless bound together by an evolving sense of Chineseness rooted in historical and more recent Sinophone culture. Significant in this are an adherence to or rejection of the socialist ideology dominant in the PRC and the durable traces of classical syncretic Daoist/Buddhist/Confucian thinking and practice which continue to give shape to an identifiable Chinese habitus. The general aspirations of that habitus towards dynamic reciprocity and unity – as signified by the Daoist/Confucian pairing of *yin-yang* (阴阳) – contrast with the oppositional dialectics and serial disjuncture of European/American avant-garde modernist, postmodernist and contemporary culture.

III

Video art is produced and exhibited across the Sinosphere under differing localised sociopolitical, cultural and discursive conditions as well as for diverse artistic purposes. Those purposes include quasi-/documentary filmmaking (e.g. Cao Fei), poetical representation (e.g. Yang Fudong) and disjunctive appropriation (e.g. Ellen Pau and Zhang Peili). Videos by artists across the Sinosphere share in the defamiliarising potential of avant-garde modernist, postmodernist and contemporary art produced in European/American and other Western/ised contexts – video is by its very nature a form of collage-montage/assemblage that excises imagery from the visual realm and situates it in new re-motivational contexts and combinations. They also incorporate thinking and practice specific to historical and present-day Sinophone societies and cultures. While the former imputes a sense of contemporaneity and of being part of a wider international artworld, the latter gives video art produced by artists of Chinese identity localised cultural definition. In European/American and related Westernised contexts there has been a tendency since the late twentieth century to interpret artistic defamiliarisation/collage-montage as deconstructive; that is to say, as demonstrating the inability of language – symbolic, indexical and visual – to close definitively on meaning and the representation of being.

IV

Video has been widely adopted by artists in the mainland PRC because of its perceived use-value as a means of documenting social reality in keeping with a still locally dominant socialist ideology. Documentary and reportage video is not included in 'In-/Visible Spectrums.' Instead, the exhibition showcases video artworks that tend toward the lyrical, conceptually abstract, poetic and indeterminately disjunctive and where the visual predominates over written and spoken narratives. This curatorial choice aims to showcase videos that traverse cultural boundaries between post-/avant-gardist disjuncture and Chinese cultural tendencies toward dynamic reciprocity/unity. All of which takes place in relation to the conspicuous multi-polarity of twenty-first century contemporaneity where intersections between European/American post-/modernism and Chinese culture are

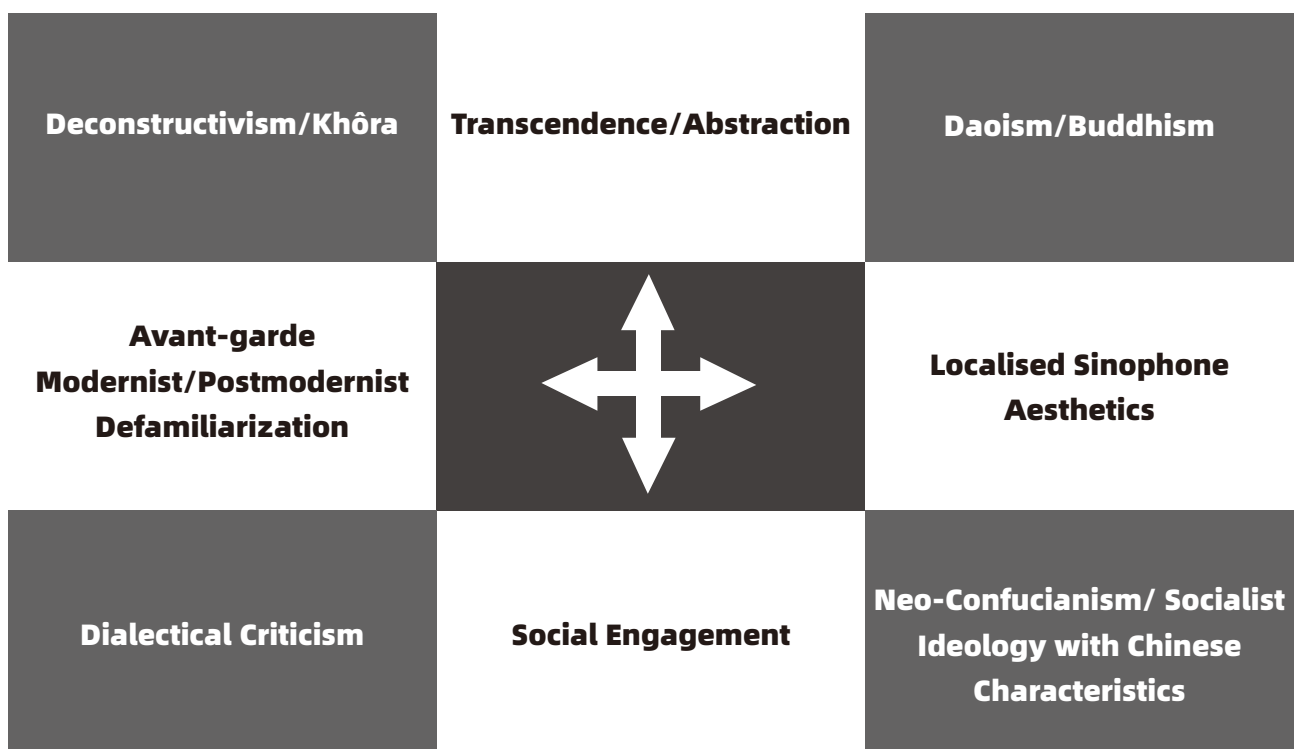
revealed by parallax cultural turns as deconstructive and/or unifying in their aesthetic effects/affects. It is, however, important to note that all the mainland Chinese artists whose work is included in In-/Visible assert a desire to address reality. This not only reflects the continuing legacy of Maoist socialist realism but also the longer standing pragmatic idealism of Confucianism and its focus on a perfectible society.

V

The idea of the Sinosphere intervenes critically with the imaginary of a unified 'Greater China', which seeks to gloss over differences in sociopolitical and cultural outlook among Sinophone communities. The Sinosphere also resists interpretation as a cultural-linguistic 'empire' consonant with the recently revived classical Chinese conception of *Tianxia* ('everything under heaven') – a domain of pervasive control supposedly reaching concentrically across the entire globe from a centralised seat of power in geographical China. Moreover, it disrupts present-day geopolitical boundaries based on European conceptions of the post-Westphalian treaty nation-state. In recent decades, the idea of a Chinese contemporary art (*Zhongguo dangdai yishu* 中国当代艺术) has tended to focus on mainland China to the exclusion of Hong Kong, Taiwan and Chinese diasporas as almost entirely separate considerations. Such thinking effectively upholds mainland China as the true centre of Chinese identity established as a matter of realpolitik with the accession of the PRC to the United Nations' Security Council in 1972 in replacement of Taiwan.

VI

It is contended here that the video artworks included in 'In-/Visible Spectrums' – and by extension all contemporary art across the Sinosphere – can be interpreted (provisionally) in relation to a matrix comprising two central crossing axes and resulting quadrants of intersectional significance.



VII

Horizontal axis:

Contemporary art from the Sinosphere is given significance by its bringing together of thinking and practice associated with European/American avant-garde modernist, postmodernist and contemporary art with localised Chinese culture. The former's signature use of defamiliarisation – including collage-montage, assemblage, allegory and pastiche – imputes a sense of being contemporary as well as a potential to deconstruct authoritative meaning through the open-ended disjunctive multiplication of significances. The latter – which includes signs and symbols and artistic techniques as well as aesthetical feelings familiar to Sinophone cultures, such as those associated with classical Chinese painting and poetry – lends Sinospheric contemporary art, with varying degrees of complexity, its 'Chineseness.' Works of contemporary art from the Sinosphere can be located somewhere along that transcultural axis dependent on their individual degrees of cultural polarization/orientation. This contemporary transculturality extends a longer relay of cultural interactions between Europe/America, Westernised states and China since the seventeenth century as part of the development differing localised forms of modernity across all those locations. Included in that relay is the impact of Chinese culture on European romanticism during the Enlightenment and immediate post-Enlightenment periods – for example, the translation of Chinese aesthetics as part of English garden design in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Modernity is by no means a unitary or purely European/American construction.

Positioning along this horizontal axis opens further questions of parallaxic transcultural interpretation. Post-/modernist artistic defamiliarisation and classical Chinese aesthetics both involve interactions between rationalist and non-rationalist thought/feeling. In the case of European/American modernism and postmodernism defamiliarisation upholds and simultaneously unsettles rationalization as part of a wider post-Enlightenment project in which progress is secured through a continual, serially incomplete, criticality. As part of classical Chinese aesthetics – whose overarching cosmological view arguably gives shape to a historically evolving Chinese cultural-linguistic habitus still operative today – Confucianism's rationalizing aspirations toward an ordered society based on respect for others and a desire for individual self-improvement is always subject to the qualifying intervention of a non-rationalist dialectics associated with Daoism's upholding of the dynamically reciprocal pairing of *yin-yang* – that which is masculine and tuned toward the light and that which is feminine and turned toward darkness – as the fundamental 'way' of the cosmos. That way is understood to involve an unfolding and ineffable relationship between *yin* and *yang* with the potential to achieve an ultimate state of reciprocity/unity. In classical Chinese culture, the indeterminate relationship between apparent opposites signified by *yin-yang* also provides a conceptual platform from which to launch criticism of Confucian rationalism – as exemplified by the writings of the third-century BCE Daoist scholar Zhuangzi – who advocates the leading of a natural and spontaneous life while also upholding the idea of an 'equality of things' (*Qi wu lun*, 齊物論) as foils to rigid rationalism and as a justification for refusing overweening political authority ('declining the throne' – *Rang wang*, 讓王).

The dynamic pairing of *yin* and *yang* also is the basis upon which classical Chinese aesthetics is constructed. The ruling desideratum of classical Chinese painting and poetry *Qiyun shengdong* (气韵生动 vital-energy resonance) envisions dynamic interrelationships between artists, nature and viewers/readers as well the life-like formal-compositional animation of depicted scenes, and the related conception of *xu-shi* (虚void-substance/empty-real) a reciprocity between weakness and/or absence and strength and/or presence in terms of formal composition. Classical Chinese painting and poetry can thus be upheld both as indexes of the wider possibility of a harmoniously ordered society and as foils to overweening rationalism. The difference in outlook between the combinatory 'non-/rationalism' of European/American post-Enlightenment aesthetics and that of classical Chinese culture is that the former points in the direction of illimitably sublime deconstructivist uncertainty while the latter conceives of an ultimate natural metaphysical unity; one that encompasses the negative and the positive, neither of which fully overcomes the other. Sinospheric contemporary art is open by turns to both of those interpretative visions, with each challenging the universal authority of its transcultural counterpart.

Since the 1990s Chinese state ideology has coopted Confucianism in adapted form to its upholding of a 'harmonious' Chinese society and the related vision of the 'China Dream.' It is important to note that this emphasis on harmony is not entirely coincident with classical Daoist ideas of unity. Daoism's cosmological vision asserts the unifying reciprocity rather than the harmonization of negative and positive elements – nature is considered by turns as being both beautiful and ugly, positive and negative.

VIII

Vertical axis:

Sinospheric contemporary art is also given definition by its proximity to or distance from society and politics. Classical Chinese painting and poetry is ostensibly aloof from sociopolitical concerns in its highly refined representation of pastoral scenes associated with the term *shan-shui* (山水). Such impressions are misleading given that the high-cultural makers of Chinese classical painting and poetry, the Literati/*Shi* were often administrators of the Chinese dynastic-imperial state and thus enmeshed with Confucianist aspirations toward a harmoniously ordered society. *Shan-shui* (literally, mountains and water) landscape paintings produced by the Literati embody those aspirations in their exquisite (supposedly) spontaneously achieved compositional refinement and potential to serve as an aestheticised rejoinder to overly rigid rationalism. Art during China's revolutionary period of the mid- to late twentieth century – in its various Westernised academic, Chinese classical, vernacular and quasi avant-garde modes, the latter making use of mechanical reproduction – broke with classical Sinophone tradition through an ideological conformity to ideas of socialist realism appropriated from the Soviet Union. This meant that art was supposed to realistically reflect the view of the masses and support ruling Chinese Communist Party (CPC) ideology. With the ending of the Cultural Revolution in the People's Republic of China towards the end of the 1970s, forms of 'modern' (*xiandai* 现代) and 'contemporary' (*dangda* 当代) art emerged that emphasised European/American avant-garde modernist and postmodernist defamiliarisation.

Some aspects of which continued to focus on sociopolitical questions, albeit - necessarily under prevailing political circumstances - without direct or obvious criticism of party authority and with others cultivating a sense of aestheticism/abstraction exclusive of any intended reference to society and politics (which can itself be interpreted as an obliquely critical departure from controlling CPC ideology). More recently, forms of socially engaged art have emerged in the PRC that intersect with similar developments internationally, including in Taiwan and among Chinese diasporic communities. Among these are artistic projects that co-opt and/or have been co-opted by a government led project of 'Rural Revitalisation' initiated in mainland China in the early twenty-first century aimed at levelling up economic and cultural activity between rural and urban areas. It is thus possible to see a variable waxing and waning of direct artistic engagements with society and politics in mainland China over time.

In Sinospheric contexts outside mainland China the onset of artistic post-/modernism and contemporaneity took place earlier in continued relation to European/American post-Enlightenment discourses that uphold art as a locus of self-reflexive and outward looking criticality with the potential to transform individual and collective consciousness and wider society. In relation to postmodernist discourses artistic defamiliarisation was widely interpreted as deconstructive of supposedly authoritative meaning. More recently, contemporary art has returned to more oppositional forms of social protest and the communication of politicised messages. In European/American post-Enlightenment contexts progressive art's critical engagement with and/or detachment from society and politics is considered a *sine qua non*.

IX

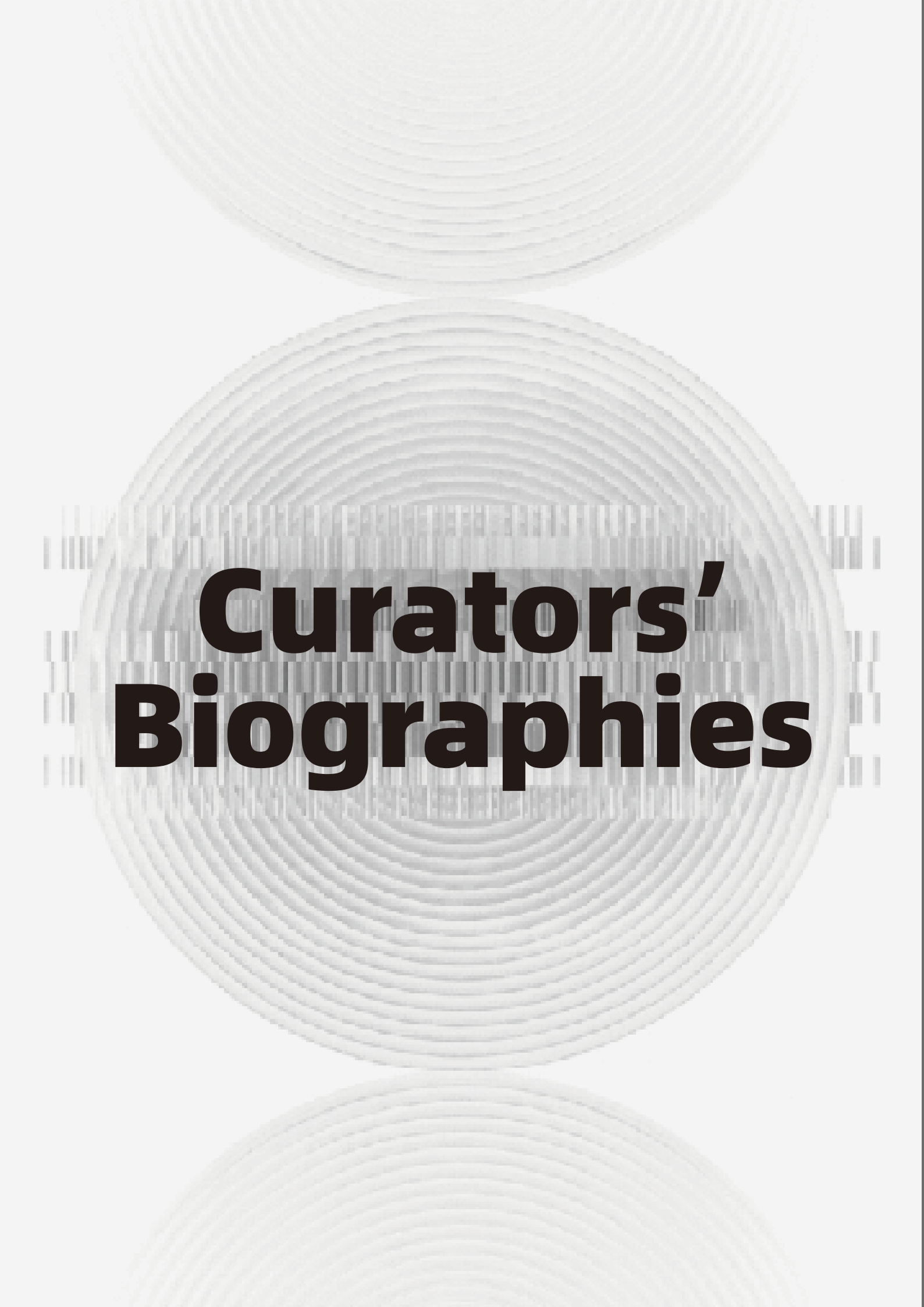
The intersection of these vertical and horizontal axes opens quadrants of differing trans-cultural and historical significance:

- The top right-hand quadrant, closer to Sinophone culture and social disengagement, can be understood to relate to the historical legacies of Daoism and Buddhism; both of which eschew worldly desiring in favour of metaphysical enlightenment.
- The top left-hand quadrant, closer to European/American post-Enlightenment defamiliarisation and abstraction, resonates with deconstructivist thinking/practice including the related re-/conceptualisation of *Khôra*.
Khôra (literally in ancient Greek, 'place,' 'space,' or 'land') has supplementary significances in Plato's *Timaeus* and later poststructuralist writings by Jacques Derrida and Julia Kristeva as an unknowable/unnameable container or interstice somewhere between being and non-being which precedes defined conception while also giving rise to the very possibility of meaning (something akin to the Derridean conception of *différance*). Such thinking is not identical to but resonates to some extent with Daoism's tripartite positing of *Wuji* (无极, ultimate non-being) as a state of undifferentiated formlessness out of which emerges the *Taiji* (太极, supreme ultimate) and from that the dynamic reciprocity of *yin-yang* (symbolised by the *Taijitu* 太極圖) as the creator of the 'multiplicity of all things.' With the former oriented toward sublimely disjunctive illimitability and the latter metaphysical unity; and each intervening with the sole authority of its supplement.
- The lower right-hand quadrant, closer to Sinophone culture and direct social engagement, is aligned with the dominance of post-revolutionary socialist ideology and its espousal of neo-Confucian values in the context of the PRC.
- The lower left-hand quadrant, closer to defamiliarisation and European/American post-Enlightenment ideas of dialectical criticality, aligns with modernist avant-garde and more recent conceptions of the socially engaged critical significance of contemporary art - that is to say, of art as a locus of transformative playfulness opposing the constrained means-end rationality of the lifeworld.

X

All the videos in the exhibition 'In-/Visible Spectrums' can be interpreted as occupying positions relative to the axes and quadrants described above. Tong Wenmin's videos, for example resist categorical interpretation in favour of an indeterminately spontaneous oneness with nature - placing them somewhere in the upper half of the matrix and perhaps more towards the upper right quadrant. While that of Li Nu seeks to reflect and poetically transform the everyday thereby challenging received experience - placing it somewhere between the lower left and lower right-hand quadrants.

Readers are invited to make their own placements of works in the exhibition within the matrix set out above. Individual readings may, of course, vary depending on differences in cultural and sociopolitical standpoint...



Curators' Biographies

Paul GLADSTON is the inaugural Judith Neilson Chair Professor of Contemporary Art, University of New South Wales, Sydney, a Distinguished Affiliate Fellow of the UK-China Humanities Alliance, Tsinghua University, Beijing and a member of the governing board of the journal *Third Text*. His book-length publications include *Contemporary Chinese Art: A Critical History* (Reaktion 2014), awarded 'best publication', Awards of Art China (2015), and *Contemporary Chinese Art, Aesthetic Modernity and Zhang Peili: Towards a Critical Contemporaneity* (Bloomsbury 2019). He is the founding editor of the Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art (Intellect) and the book series Contemporary East Asian Visual Cultures, Societies and Politics (Palgrave) as well as being the editor of numerous collected editions and special journal editions, including *Rethinking Displays of Chinese Contemporary Art: Cultural Diversity and Tradition* (Palgrave 2024) and *Visual Culture Wars at the Borders of Contemporary China: Art, Design, Film, New Media and the Prospects of "Post-West" Contemporaneity* (Palgrave 2021). He was the curatorial director of the exhibition 'Yique's Way - Mutuality in Extremes' (Ugly Duck, London 2024), organizer of a scholarly roundtable accompanying the exhibition 'Strange Wonders: Jizi and Pioneers of Contemporary Ink Art from China', SOAS Gallery (2024) and an academic advisor to the internationally acclaimed exhibition 'Art of Change: New Directions from China' (Hayward Gallery-South Bank Centre, London 2012).

Lynne HOWARTH-GLADSTON is an artist, curator, and researcher. She has exhibited her paintings internationally in China, the UK, and Australia, and was co-curator, with Paul Gladston, of numerous scholarly exhibitions, including 'New China/New Art: Contemporary Video from Shanghai and Hangzhou,' (Djanogly Art Gallery, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK 2015), 'Dis-/Continuing Traditions: Contemporary Video Art from China' (Salamanca Arts Centre, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia 2021) and 'Rain on the Platform - Tan Lijie, Selected Works' (National Chen Kung University Gallery, Taiwan 2024). Her Ph.D. thesis is the first to engage critically with the work of the nineteenth-century botanical painter, Marianne North. She is the author of the monograph *Marianne North: A Victorian Painter for the 21st Century* (Lund Humphries 2024) and was a contributor to the BBC4 documentary, *Kew's Forgotten Queen: The Life of Marianne North* (2016).

Gladston and Howarth-Gladston were resident for five years in mainland China at the University of Nottingham, Ningbo China (2005-2010) and have written extensively about Chinese contemporary art with an attention to the concerns of critical theory.

LIN ZI is an independent critic, curator, and Co-founder of YounGo Culture and Art Agency. He is dedicated to fostering international art exchanges, improving the ecology of localized art scenes and integrating psychoanalytic discourse into curatorial and critical practices. In 2017, Lin earned a Master of Arts with honors degree in Art Criticism and Writing from the School of Visual Arts (SVA) in New York, USA. He also holds dual bachelor's degrees in history and psychology from Acadia University in Canada. Since 2017, he has curated over 80 exhibitions and art events globally. Between 2016 and 2020, Lin organized 15 exhibitions in New York including 'When Black Swallows Red' at La Mama Galleria, showcasing emerging New York-based artists (2019). More recently he curated 'ArtParking' in the Capital Free Trade Cultural Zone, the 'Facade 798 Gallery Tour Exhibition' in Beijing's 798 Art District and the group exhibition 'Those Men Came from the Moon' in association with the ShanghArt Gallery, Shanghai' (all 2024) in addition to the public art project 'Artists Without Resumes' at the Rice Mill Art District, Hangzhou (2025). He also organized and curated the public art festival 'Rock-Paper-Scissors Art Carnival' at DHGE and Art Flow Art District, Shanghai (2025). Lin's practice as a curator and critic bridges interdisciplinary methodologies, global perspectives and experimental public engagement, redefining contemporary art's role in cultural and social discourse.

Yique is a graduate of the Royal College of Art, London and a Hangzhou-based artist and curator. He is known internationally for his art action *East London Core Socialist Values* (2023) which attracted conflicting high-profile commentary in the press, in situ and online when it was staged at London's graffiti art quarter on London's Brick Lane. Yique and Lin Zi recently co-curated a group exhibition in Hangzhou titled 'No Resume.' Yique and Lin have strong connections with emerging artists in mainland China specializing in video art. Yique has curated two events related to the SOAS exhibition 'In/Visible Spectrums': a three-day closed screening of videos and discussion panels 'Absent Participation-Moving Images as Art' at the Creativity and Innovation Center, Longgang District, Shenzhen City, and with Paul Gladston and Lin Zi a public screening of the work of four video artists from mainland China at the Sea World Culture and Arts Center (SWCAC), Shenzhen (both 2025).

Frank VIGNERON is Chair Professor, Department of Fine Arts, Chinese University of Hong Kong. He holds a Ph.D. in Chinese Art History from the Paris VII University, a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from the Paris IV Sorbonne University and a Doctor of Fine Arts from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. His research focuses on the history of Chinese painting from the eighteenth century onwards and aspects of Chinese contemporary art seen in a global context. He is a member of the International Association of Art Critics Hong Kong and a Museum Expert Adviser for the Leisure and Cultural Services Department of the Hong Kong SAR. Professor Vigneron is also a practicing artist. He has held several solo exhibitions in Hong Kong and has taken part in local and international group exhibitions.

