

TIMUR SI-QIN

SOCIÉTÉ



East, South, West, North, 2018

Winds of the South, great serpent, thank you for your presence here. Winds of the West, Jaguar, thank you for the teachings you bring. Winds of the North, rhymes, rhythms, patterns, ancestors and descendants, thank you for being with us. Winds of the East, details and grand overview, thank you for the light to see by. Sweet Mother Earth, we inhale your breath, we drink your blood, we eat your flesh, we – your children give thanks. Father Sky, we stand in awe and reverence of your great mystery.

- Q'ero prayer

In this show, New York-based German artist Timur Si-Qin continues his development of New Peace, a secular spirituality for the 21st century. Identifying the dualistic legacy of agricultural society and religions as maladaptive for our contemporary world, New Peace argues for a re-enchantment with matter as the necessary basis for confronting the material problems of our times. The title East, South, West, North is a reference to the sacred circle of the four directions, a primary spiritual concept in pre-agrarian/hunter gatherer religions of Central Asia and Americas. With this Si-Qin signals both a return to and necessary upgrade of our spiritual orientation and dimensionality.

In the white paper for New Peace entitled A New Protocol, the artist points out that religions are themselves technologies of belief. Protocols for human behavior towards one another and their environments. However today the spiritual vs material dualism inherent to agricultural society and religion has become a maladaptive constraint that prevents us from adequately conceptualizing our connection to, and impact on, the non-human world. The response is a new secular spirituality of matter and an elucidation of a non-human ethics of difference.

Influenced by currents of New Materialist philosophy that challenge the anthropocentric privileging of the human subject since the beginning of his practice, Si-Qin seeks a spiritual and intellectual reconceptualization in which the material is recognized for its inherent dynamism and creative potentiality. A plane of

immanence on which animals, plants and other organisms are recognized as being connected to and on equal ontological footing with the human. In many ways resembling the cosmologies of pre-agrarian cosmologies.

In this "radical immanence", when the interconnected oneness of reality is recognized, the fractal patterning, movement, and infinite creativity of matter are elevated to the sacred. Within "infinite difference", the ceaseless variation and differentiation of matter attests to an irreducible and open ended universe. New Peace breaks with the illusion of the separation between human and nature, but it also provides a new channel for appropriate reflection on and effective intervention in the reality of the world, such as climate change and retrogressive political life.

The ritual practice of New Peace, like a sacred circle, draws on many different patterns, whether artworks or physical architecture on the earth. In the exhibition, a group of all-new sculpture works made of crab, insect, shell, tree, and other beings the artist had encountered and 3d scanned become the agents and participants of a new ritual and space of worship. Here, the artist attempts to awaken an older animal power, tracing the relationship between human and animal back to a more primal connection. This move is echoed by digitally rendered landscapes in lightboxes and VR, which further point towards the dissolution of the nature/culture divide.

The dialogue between the artist and a diverse array of materials, whether stones, lighted advertisements, digital images, or machines, is not only limited to aesthetic forms and considerations, but on a deeper level, this dialogue advocates for the independent, open consideration of culture as an emergent manifestation of matter. As various outmoded boundaries wear away, a collapse of the dualities of nature and culture, synthetic and organic, subject and object precipitates the question of how should art reconstruct subjectivity, consciousness, and morality within the material? New Peace is Si-Qin's attempt to provide a potential path and personal resources for humanity to re-orient itself in an age of cataclysmic change.



Installation view
East, West, South, North
Magician Space, Beijing, 2018



Installation view
East, West, South, North
Magician Space, Beijing, 2018



NP Contingency Altar, 2018
3D printing material, acrylic, PMMA plate, floor sticker, rope, silk
Dimensions variable



A New Protocol VR v.1.2, 2018
Fiberglass, VR, English & Chinese, VR glasses, PC, fiberglass
dimension variable



Agora, 2018

Agora is a group exhibition that looks at the role of art in defining, creating, and using public space. The exhibition takes its name from the ancient Greek word referring to the square—the public gathering area that was the core of commercial, artistic, political, and spiritual life in old city-states like Athens. For centuries, artists have used public locations—and the public in general—as the heart of their work. By transforming public places into theaters and arenas for performances and collective actions, artists mobilize a kind of collective voice of the people. By manipulating our expectations of what does and does not belong in these ostensibly collectively owned spaces, artists challenge what public spaces are, how they're made, and who they're made for. The forms of artists' works in public space vary widely in scale, volume, and form, from single speaker's corners to sprawling protests; from grand parades and processions to secret, intimate performances; from bronze historical equestrian statues to initials etched in pavement; and from WPA murals to graffiti tags. However, across time they share common themes, challenging why and how public space, life, and activities are separated from private ones; how boundaries are drawn, built, and transgressed; and who is allowed to stand and speak, and where.

The unprecedented volume of forest fires in recent years and the general progression of drought and deforestation due to climate change has inspired this work. The piece is composed of a series of aluminum casts of burned trees that were 3d scanned in northern

California in the wake of the Tubbs fire of October, 2017. Together in their composition they form a kind of arbor, or architecture, or corporeal rib-cage. Symbolizing the passing of our current world and yet comforted by the inescapable patterning of reality—forgiving of the past and confident in the growth of the future.

The exhibition looks at the power of art to change society, the role of art in public space, and whether art can be a form of protest. Artists working in public often take a political tone, mobilizing the public for social and political change, and for the possibility of realizing an alternate future. On the High Line—a public space and a natural platform—nine artists share their experiences inhabiting, speaking out of, and challenging the assumed boundaries of public space, where different voices can be heard, addressing important topics such as women's rights, mass incarceration, the environment, and immigration.

Timur Si-Qin (b. 1984, Berlin, Germany) creates artwork that posits advertising and commercial marketing as a result and extension of biology. Across his practice, Si-Qin works to combat essentialism—whether in branding, language, or nature itself. He often builds seemingly organic environments whose underlying industrial structures can be easily seen, thus calling into question the things we take for granted as "natural" or "unnatural." For the High Line, Si-Qin presents *Forgiving Change*, aluminum casts of a burned tree branch from Pepperwood Preserve, which was the site of one of the many forest fires that crossed the west coast of North America in 2017.



Forgiving Change, 2018
Cast aluminum and paint
dimensions variable



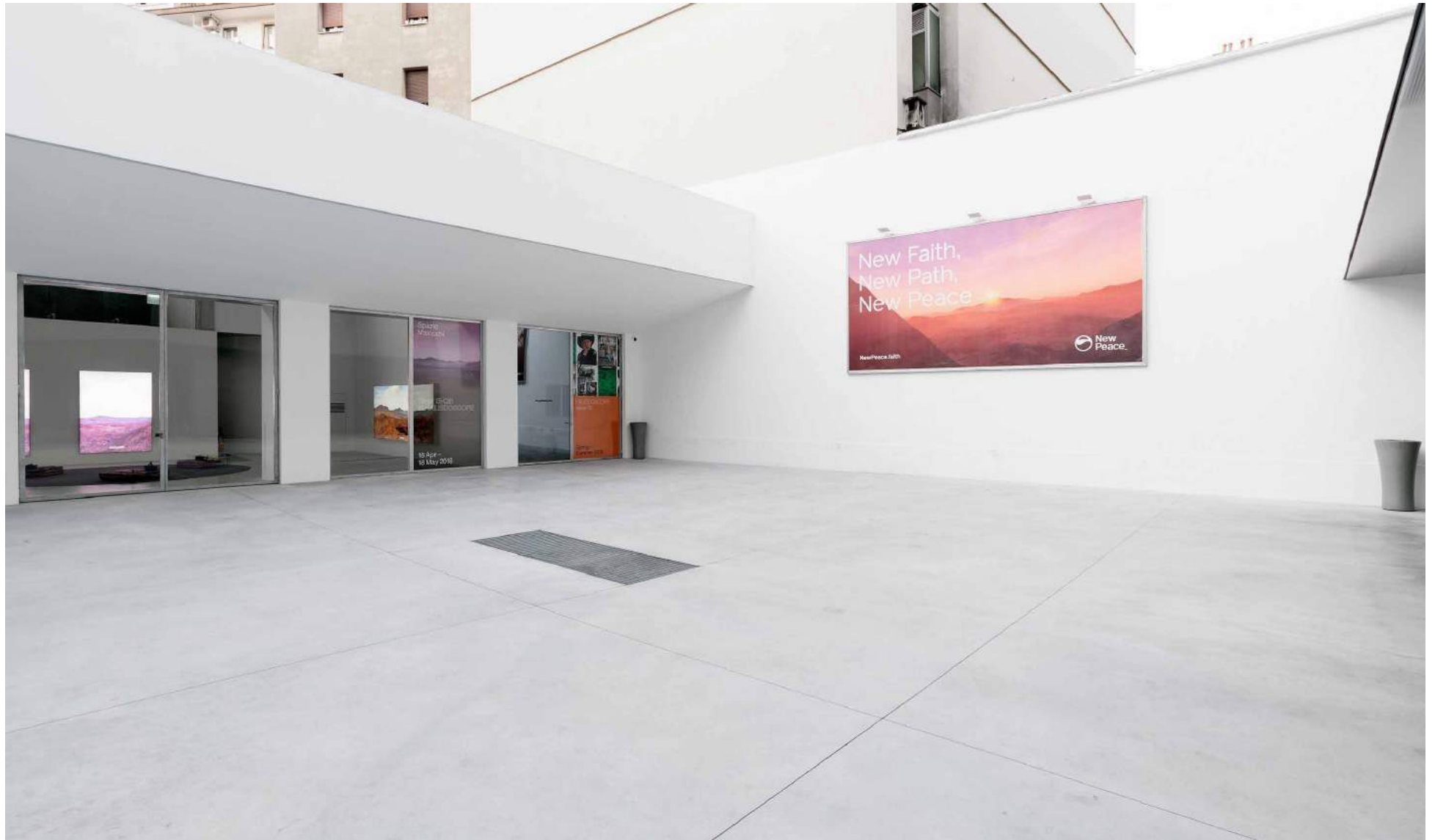






Forgiving Change 2, 2018
Cast steel

300 x 430 x 230 cm / 118 x 169 1/3 x 90 1/2 in
Public Art Project of Gallery Weekend Beijing 2018, 798 Art Zone, Beijing



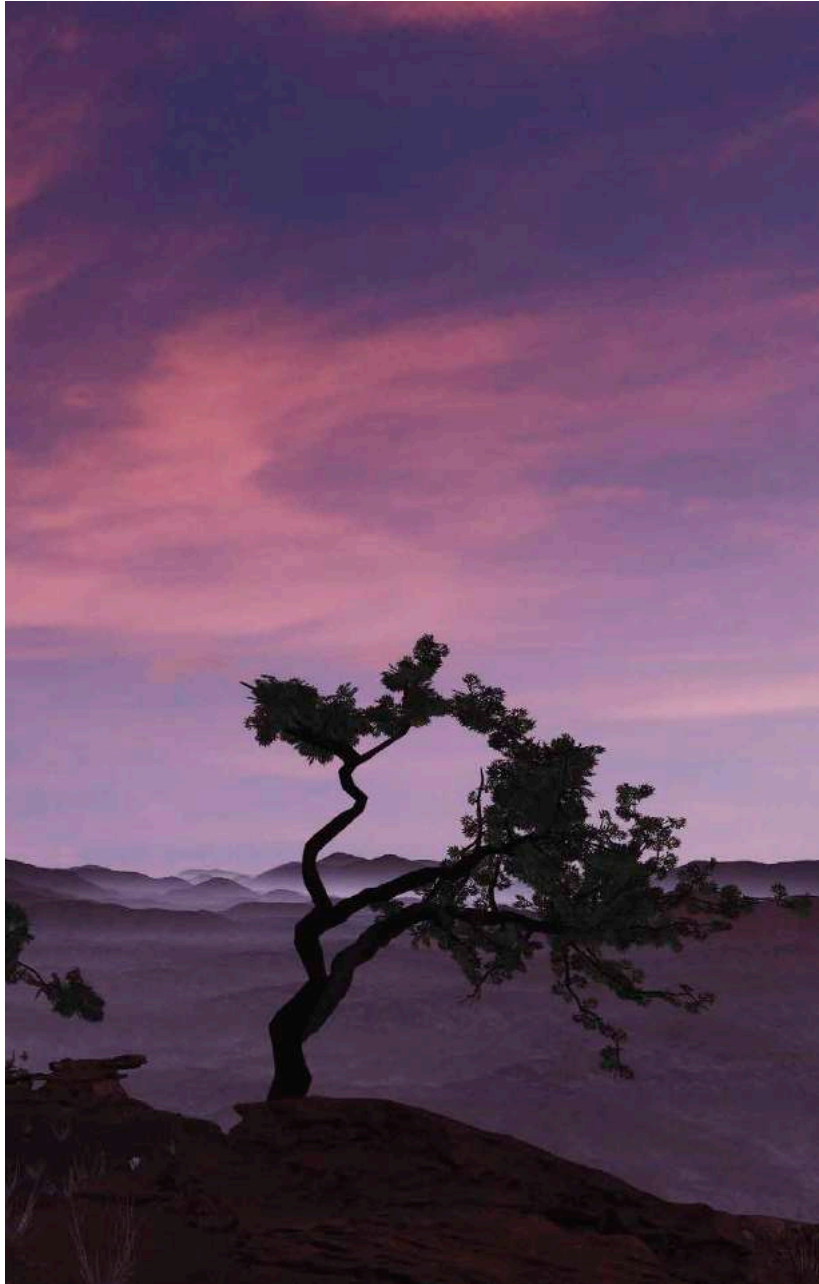
Installation view
Campaign for a New Protocol, Part III
Spazio Maiocchi, Milan, 2018



Installation view
Campaign for a New Protocol, Part III
Spazio Maiocchi, Milan, 2018



Installation view
Campaign for a New Protocol, Part III
Spazio Maiocchi, Milan, 2018



Campaign for a New Protocol, Part II, 2018

Life on this planet stands at the cusp of a great threshold. As we awaken to the full scale of space and time, we awaken also to our own capacities for altering our planet and ourselves. Now more than ever, do humans need to construct new myths and express a new sense of spirituality.

Religions have always been technologies of belief, protocols for organizing environmental and social interactions. But today's faiths, adapted for ancient agrarian conditions, no longer serve us, and in fact imperil our habitat.

New Peace rejects the old dualisms of nature vs. culture and spirit vs. matter, instead fostering a non-dual conception of reality. It is a new protocol to understanding one's place in the vastness of time and space and a toolkit for building new myths and meanings for a world undergoing profound changes. A radically inclusive, secular faith of the real. A mysticism for the anthropocene that fosters a spiritual relationship to matter itself. No divine beings,

transcendent realms or eternal essences necessary: only the true infinite creativity of pattern, matter, and energy.

In Campaign for A New Protocol, Si-Qin launches a drive to communicate a new sense of non dualistic and secular spirituality adapted for the future. Here, the natural and the synthetic coalesce beyond the dualities through digitally rendered landscapes of New Peace's advertisements and in an immersive virtual reality experience.

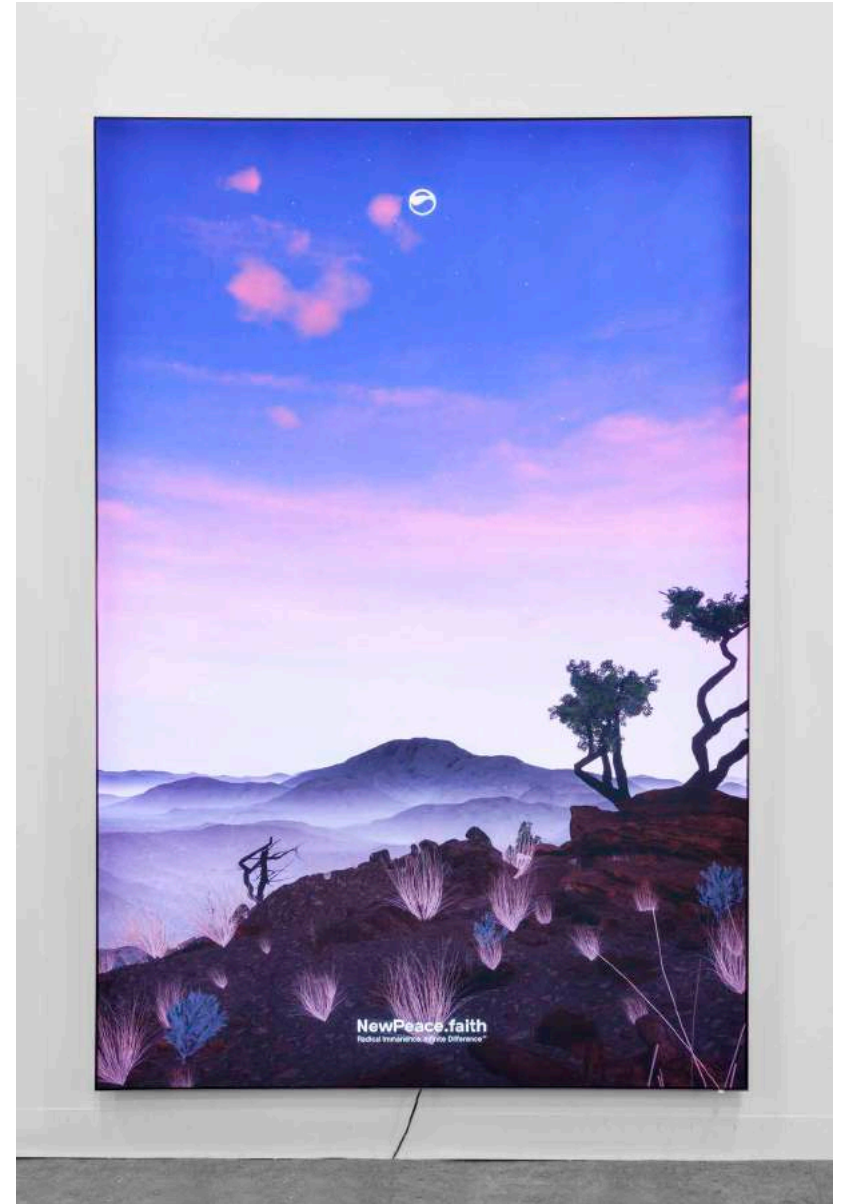
For Art Basel Hong Kong, Si-Qin delves deeper into the substance of New Peace with Introduction to a New Protocol - a virtual reality experience and installation that immerses viewers in a digitally rendered landscapes and in the new spirituality's basic rhetoric. Here, the natural and the synthetic coalesce in a space beyond the spirit/matter dualities New Peace seeks to shed.



Campaign for a New Protocol, Part II
3 lightboxes, 3 fibreglass rocks, carpet, VR file
Dimensions variable



Campaign for a New Protocol, Part II - A
Backlit tension display, aluminium frame, LED light system
210 x 140 x 5 cm / 82 2/3 x 55 x 2 in



Campaign for a New Protocol, Part II - B
Backlit tension display, aluminium frame, LED light system
210 x 140 x 5 cm / 82 2/3 x 55 x 2 in



Campaign for a New Protocol, Part II - C
Backlit tension display, aluminium frame, LED light system
210 x 140 x 5 cm / 82 2/3 x 55 x 2 in



Installation view
Campaign for A New Protocol Part I
Société, Berlin, 2018



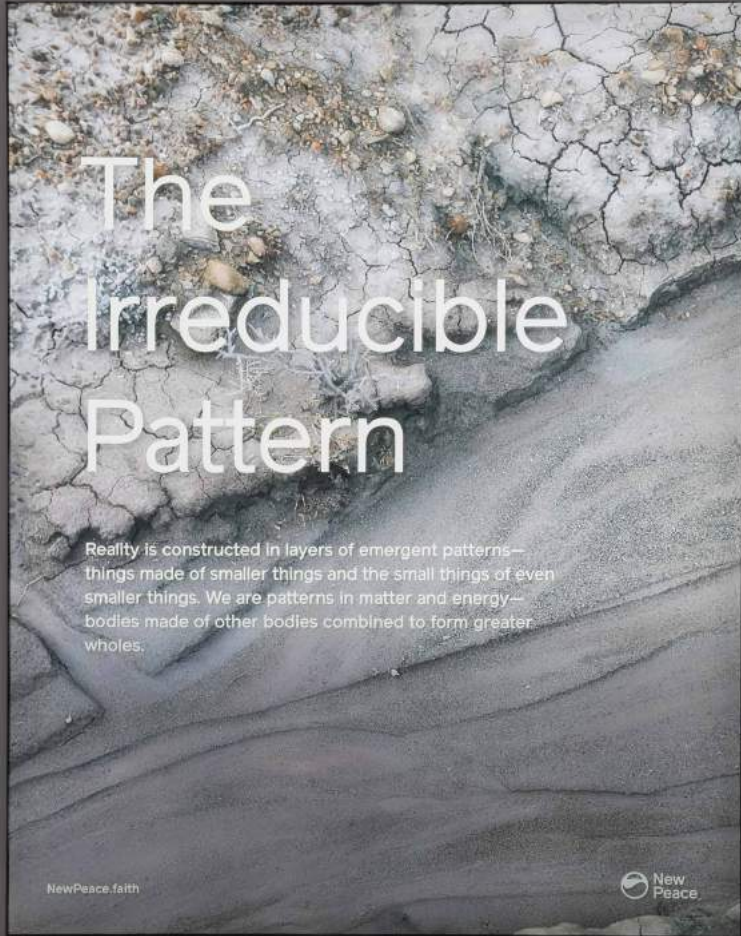
Installation view
Campaign for A New Protocol Part I
Société, Berlin, 2018



Installation view
Campaign for A New Protocol Part I
Société, Berlin, 2018



Installation view
Campaign for A New Protocol Part I
Société, Berlin, 2018



The Irreducible Pattern - A + B, 2018
Backlit tension display, aluminum frame, LED light system
170 x 292 x 5 cm / 67 x 115 x 2 in



Installation view
Campaign for A New Protocol Part I
Société, Berlin, 2018

New Peace is a new protocol for understanding one's place in the vastness of time and space. A radically inclusive, secular, faith of the real. A mysticism for the anthropocene. One that fosters a spiritual relationship with the infinite creativity of pattern, matter and energy.

Three Observations

At the heart of New Peace lie three observations. From these observations follow a cascade of ramifications that help articulate a new sense of spirituality for today and the future, and from which can be derived a new orientation to the world.





The Undivided Ground

Everything that exists exists as part of the one whole, undivided ground of matter, energy, and information. New Peace rejects transcendent, planes, supernatural realms, and eternal essences because our universe of infinite creativity is sacred and repeatable in and of itself.



The Truth of Difference

Difference is the point of life and the material universe. Through the evolution of the cosmos, we are the story of matter being told to itself in infinite permutations. By recognizing this truth the foundations of a new post-human ethics can be laid.



A Faith in Morphogenesis

New Peace seeks to introduce a new understanding of faith based on the inherent capacity for matter to organize and grow itself into the diverse, aesthetic, and diverse patterns found at every scale of our universe.

New Peace



Commit to a World outside yourself

From the circle of correlation, other people, animals, and organisms are not merely the constructed projections of our socializations. They exist independently of our images, images, and language. Belief in the independent reality of the other is the necessary foundation for a new ethics of people, animals, and ecosystems.

New Peace

NewPeace.faith



New Peace

NewPeace.faith

Installation view
Campaign for A New Protocol Part I
Société, Berlin, 2018



Installation view
Campaign for A New Protocol Part I
Société, Berlin, 2018



New Faith 1, 2018
Perforated vinyl print, plexi glass, mirror, 3d print, LED
89.5 x 67 x 22.5 cm / 35 x 27 x 8 3/4 in



Is it True theres no such thing as Truth?
Produktion. Made in Germany Drei
Sprengel Museum Hannover, 2017

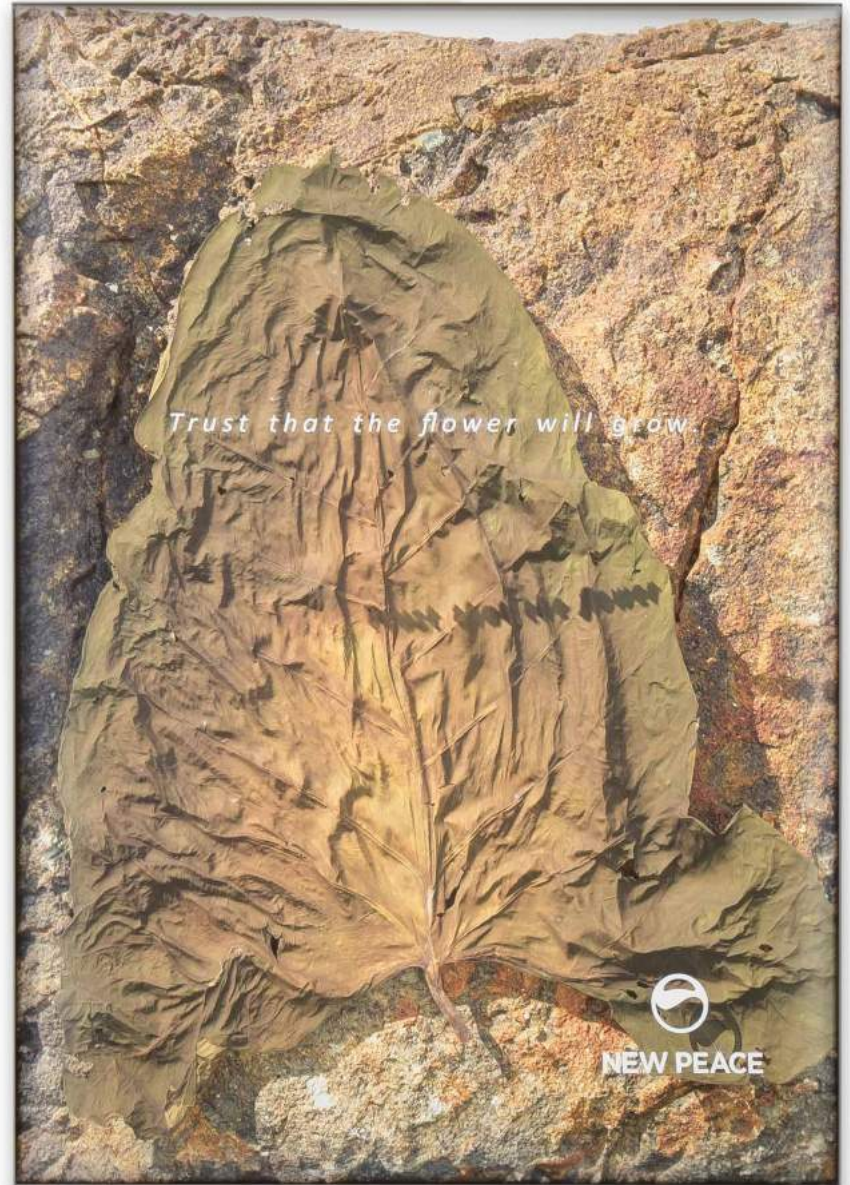


Installation view
Produktion. Made in Germany Drei
Sprengel Museum Hannover, 2017





visitmirrorscape.com



Trust that the flower will grow

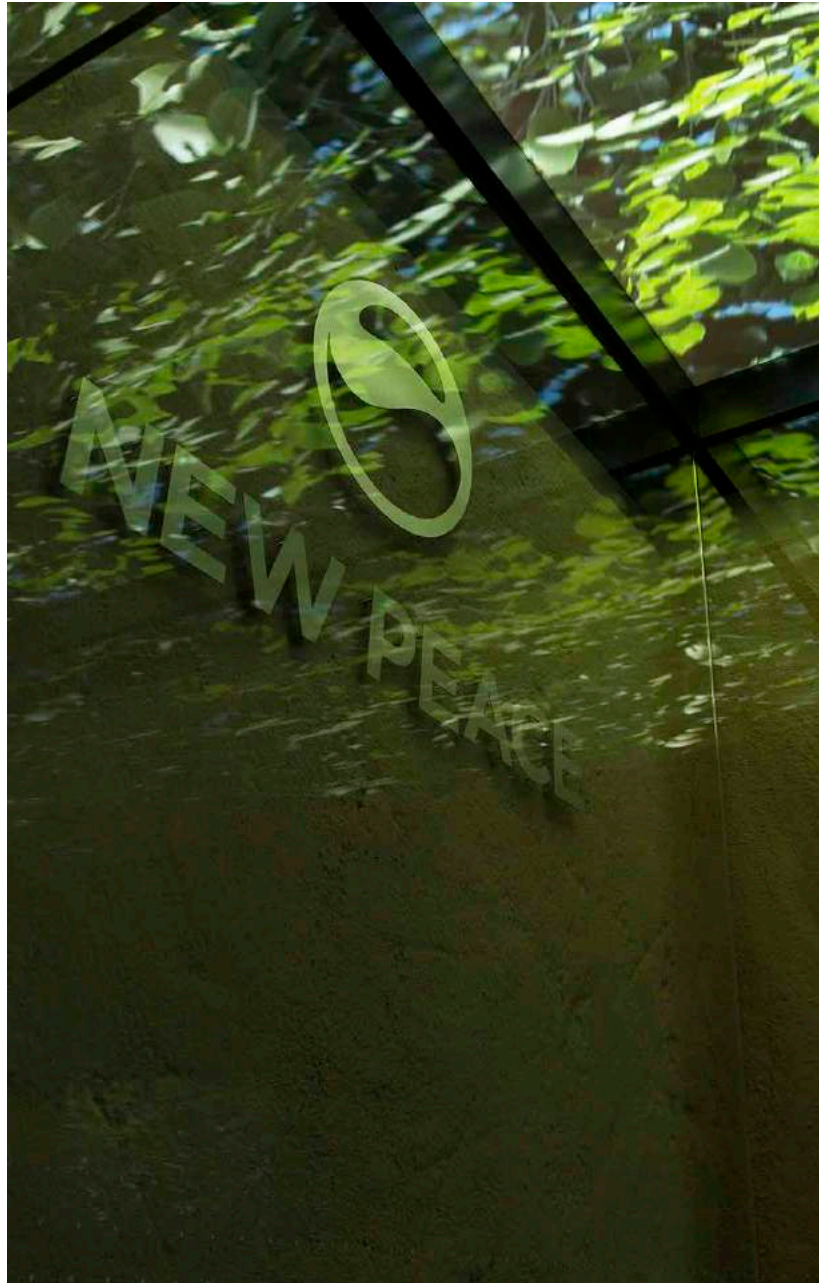


NEW PEACE

Trust that the flower will grow, 2016
Exhume Consume, Mathew Gallery, 2016



Installation view
New Peace Prayer Chamber, 2016
Art Basel Statements under the auspices of Société, 2016



Art Basel Statements, 2016

In his work, Si-Qin combines and alters forms and materials from culture in order to examine the way that, over time, they have come to carry meaning. He is interested in what attracts vast groups of people to specific forms and subjects. And he likens those specific forms and subjects to reflect the tendencies and capacities of culture as a dynamic and emergent material process.

Si-Qin's new work for Art Basel Statements 2016 elaborates on this process by envisioning a prayer space, entitled "New Peace", for a future religion. The religion is grounded in a philosophy of materialimmanence. With a disbelief in eternal essences, "New Peace" stands for an infinitely openyet-causal reality of emergent and contingent entities. And for the belief universe exists in order for matter to experience all variations of itself.

The prayer space contains the video-mantra "Mirrorscape". It is a sub-brand, a spiritual destination and a state of mind all at once – represented by the iconography of the simulated landscape. The simulated landscape alludes to both the digitality of matter as well as the peculiar yet sacred ability of matter to simulate its own future.

"New Peace" and "Mirrorscape" are also the latest evolution of Si-Qin's interest in branding,

iconography and the psychology of marketing. Si-Qin thinks of brands as ecological sculptures that distribute themselves topologically – as defined by their environments and relations. Brands extend throughout several times and various spaces, each time inheriting new meanings. The "New Peace" logo, a rebrand of PEACE, follows Si-Qin's interest in the way that signs can be combined to create or cancel out meanings. Si-Qin's combination of the word 'peace' and the taijitu symbol serves to disarticulate sign and signifier: the taijitu doesn't have a direct connection with the concept of peace. In this way, Si-Qin investigates the extent to which something can stand for something else and to what extent symbols and images can take on new meanings, revealing a lack of essence.

The lack of universal essences as well as primary teachings of Buddhism, Taoism and systems theory are also at the heart of Si-Qin's motivation in using the aesthetics and imagery of advertising and commerce. In order to hedge against the idea that images can be read as the essence of contemporary ideologies, a form of stereotyping. Si-Qin instead adheres to the belief that aesthetics, like everything else, are contingently formed.

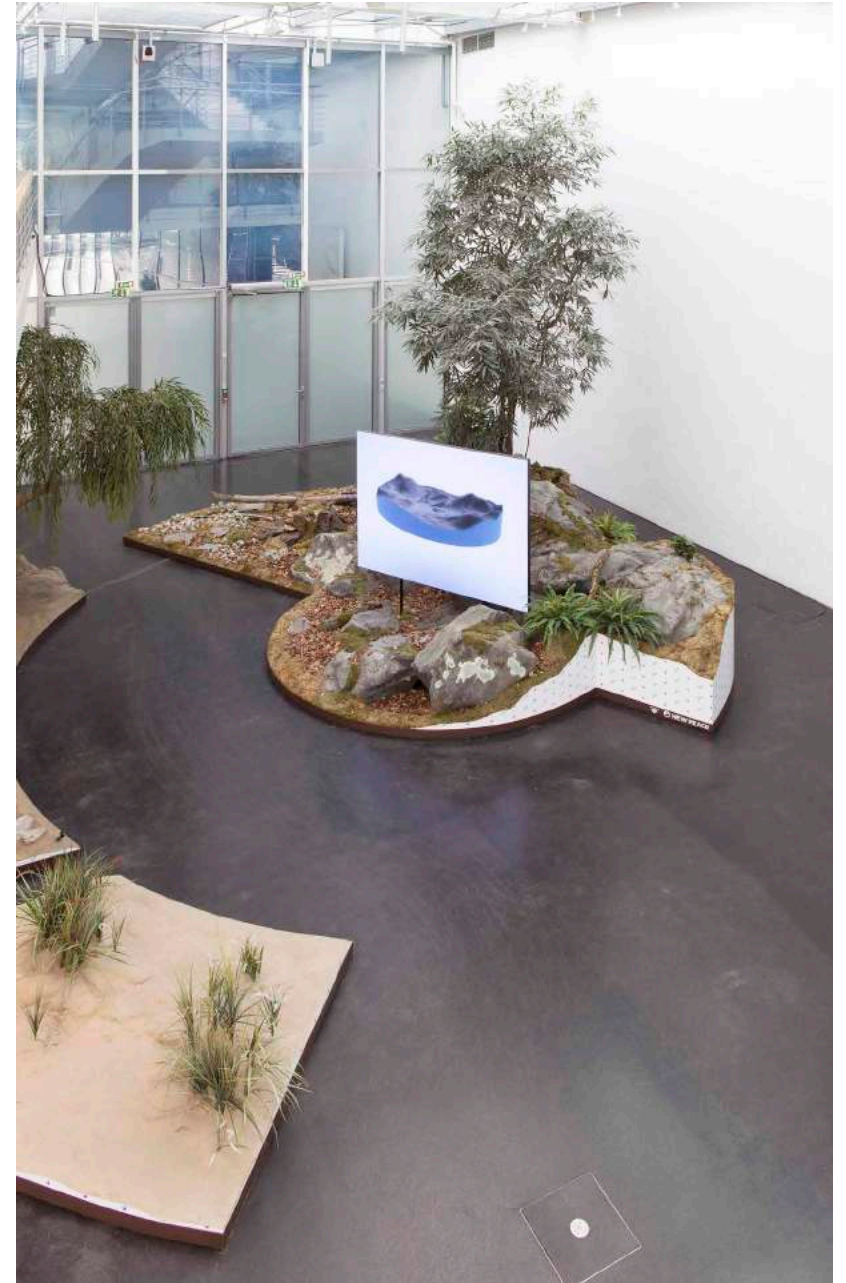




Installation view
A Reflected Landscape, 2016
9th Berlin Biennale, Berlin, 2016

A Reflected Landscape, 2016
9th Berlin Biennale

A Reflected Landscape is a terrain comprising a mixture of real and artificial greenery, rocks, and an LED video installation featuring content thematically centered around the landscape itself. It is a landscape reflected in its own mediated image. The recursive nature of the work embodies contemporary mechanisms of reflection and feedback whose non-linear and fractal dynamics are inherent to life and matter itself. Like the central Buddhist concept of Pratityasamutpada, or dependent co-arising, Timur Si-Qin suggests humans and nature, as mutually symbiotic agencies that represent and construct each other—a post-anthropocentric diorama in which nature has gained the capacity for self-understanding.







Installation view
Welt am Draht
JULIA STOSCHEK COLLECTION, Berlin, 2016



Visit Mirrorscape 2016: Arrive, 2016
Backlit tension fabric display, aluminium frame, LED light system
100 x 220 x 16 cm / 39 1/3 x 86 2/3 x 6 1/3 in



Visit Mirrorscape 2016: Here, 2016
Backlit tension fabric display, aluminium frame, LED light system
100 x 220 x 16 cm / 39 1/3 x 86 2/3 x 6 1/3 in



Installation view
A Place Like This
Team Gallery (bungalow), Los Angeles, 2016

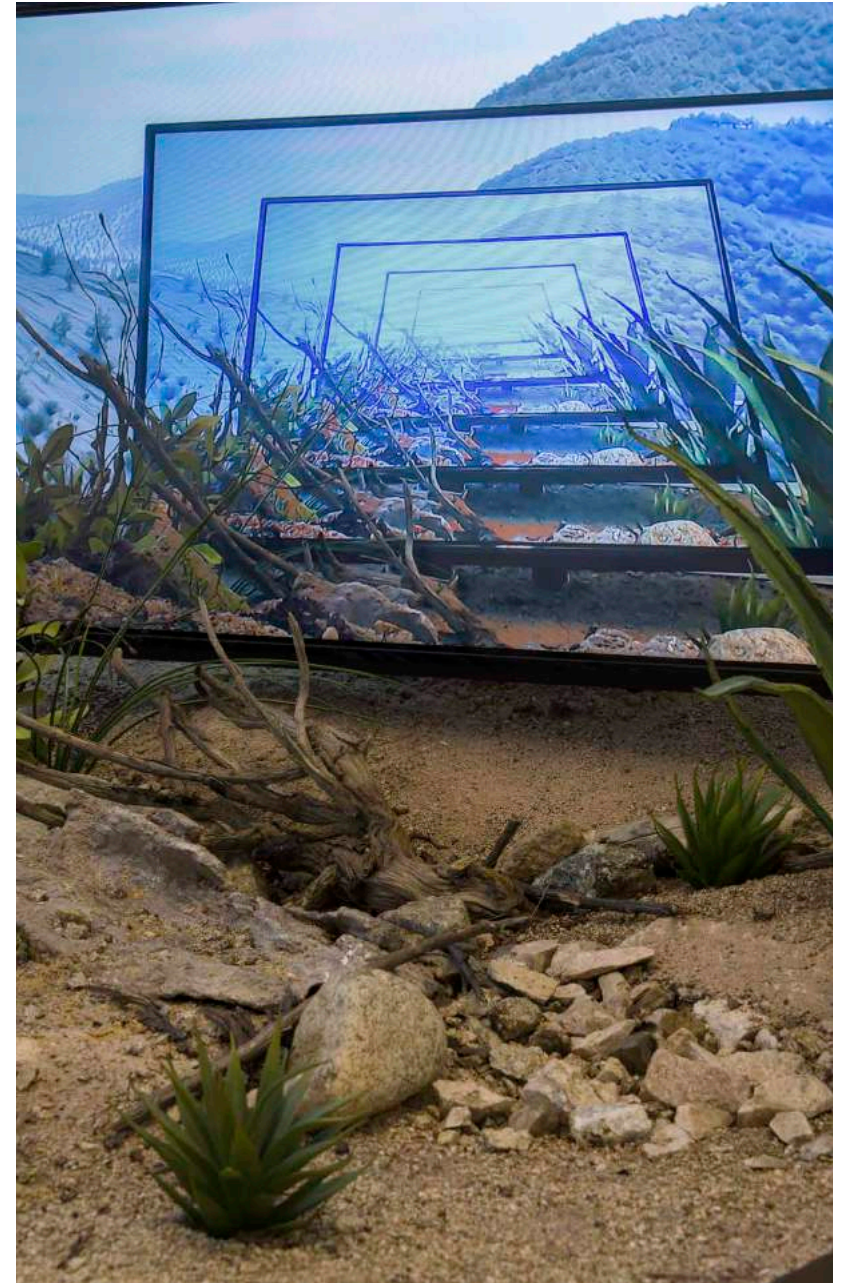
A Place Like This, 2016

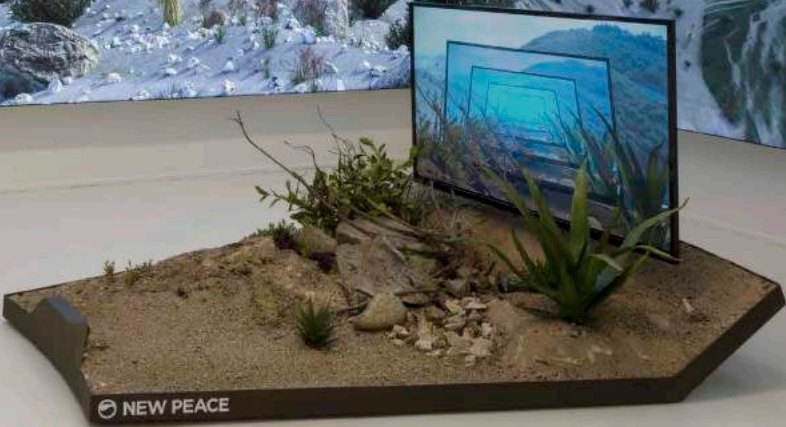
In this exhibition, Si-Qin imagines a future materialist-spiritual institution called New Peace. New Peace is an update to the artist's PEACE brand, a recurrent image in his work. Si-Qin envisages the brand as a topological sculpture, capable of being expressed in varying forms and inheriting different meanings over time. The work speaks in the language of products and advertisement, not as a linguistic symbol of "capitalism" or economics in a general sense but rather inhabits this language because this language inhabits the world. Si-Qin's mirroring of commercial imagery reiterates our anthropogenic relationships of feedback and reflection with ecology, environment, and media.

New Peace takes form through the imagined-trappings of a cult that worships matter and believes that reality and its cosmic, biological, and cultural evolutions exist to create the greatest variation of form possible in the universe, and for matter to experience all variations of itself. This principle is summarized by the text found in the crest form of the logo, *replicatio variationi servit*, Latin for "replication serves variation."

New Peace uses landscape as a virtual attractor to communicate a mystical state of being called Mirrorscape. Mirrorscape is a sub-brand, as well as a state of awareness of the causal, non-linear behaviors of matter. It is a spiritual destination where the fine-grained network effects and feedback dynamics of reality can be clearly perceived. In other words, the capacity to see existence "as it is." Mirrorscape does not represent a naive realism unaffected by interpretation, but rather an understanding of the interactive processes by which the world is constructed.

The sculpture at the center of the exhibition is a prototype effigy of Mirrorscape. The piece resembles a kind of protean machine, reminiscent of both a Natural History Museum display and a commercial product. At the rear of the sculpture is a television showing a live feed of itself, which is being recorded by a WebCam affixed to the base of the sculpture, and thereby forming a self-imaging feedback circuit: a landscape reflected in its own mediated image.



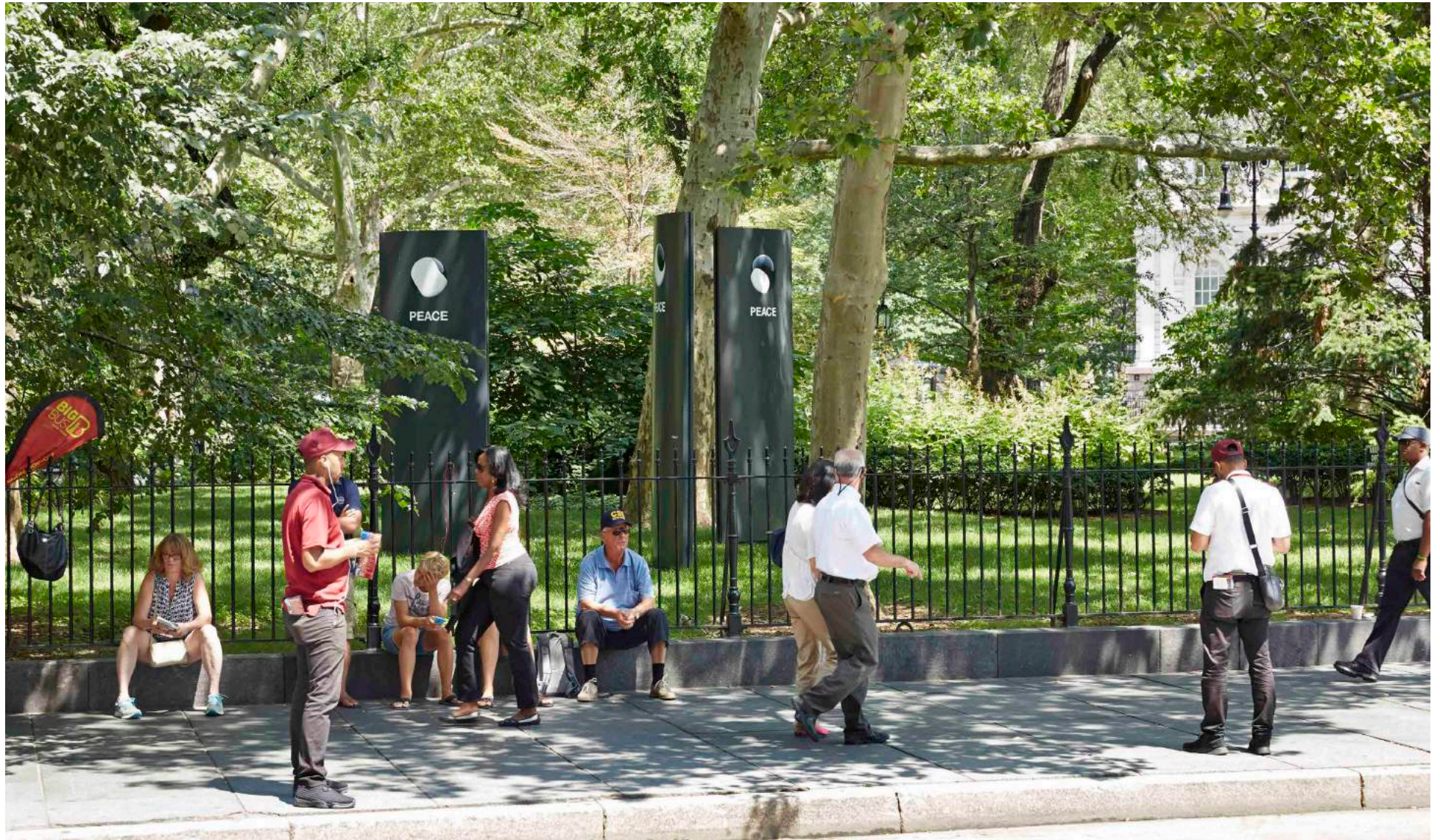




Monument to Exaptation, 2015

The title of the work, Monument to Exaptation, refers to an evolutionary shift, one Timur Si Qin likens to changes in our behavior toward image culture and branding in the digital era. These three sculptures appropriate the form of an archetypal advertising space – one that might be placed at the entrance to a strip mall or car dealership – and their concave shapes intentionally allows the eye to linger few seconds longer on the surface of the image. These contemporary totems are displayed in City Hall Park in an almost ceremonial fashion, depicting several iterations of Si-Qin's signature logo for peace. Rather than serving as a platform for advertising, the objects function like a future monument to the visual landscape of today.





Installation view
Monument to Exaptation
Public Art Fund, New York, 2015



Installation view
Monument to Exaptation
Public Art Fund, New York, 2015

Step and Repeat, 2016

Step and repeat banners are commonly found at publicity events and particularly star-studded parties, a convenient way for sponsors to introduce their logos into red carpet photos. The brand combines these signifiers in a way that strips them of their original meanings, illustrating a contingent transmutation of signs, a transmutation possible only by the lack of essences or transcendent identity of signifiers. This lack of essences is itself a Taoist teaching. The PEACE brand, like most of Si-Qin's work, is also driven by an interest in the morphogenesis

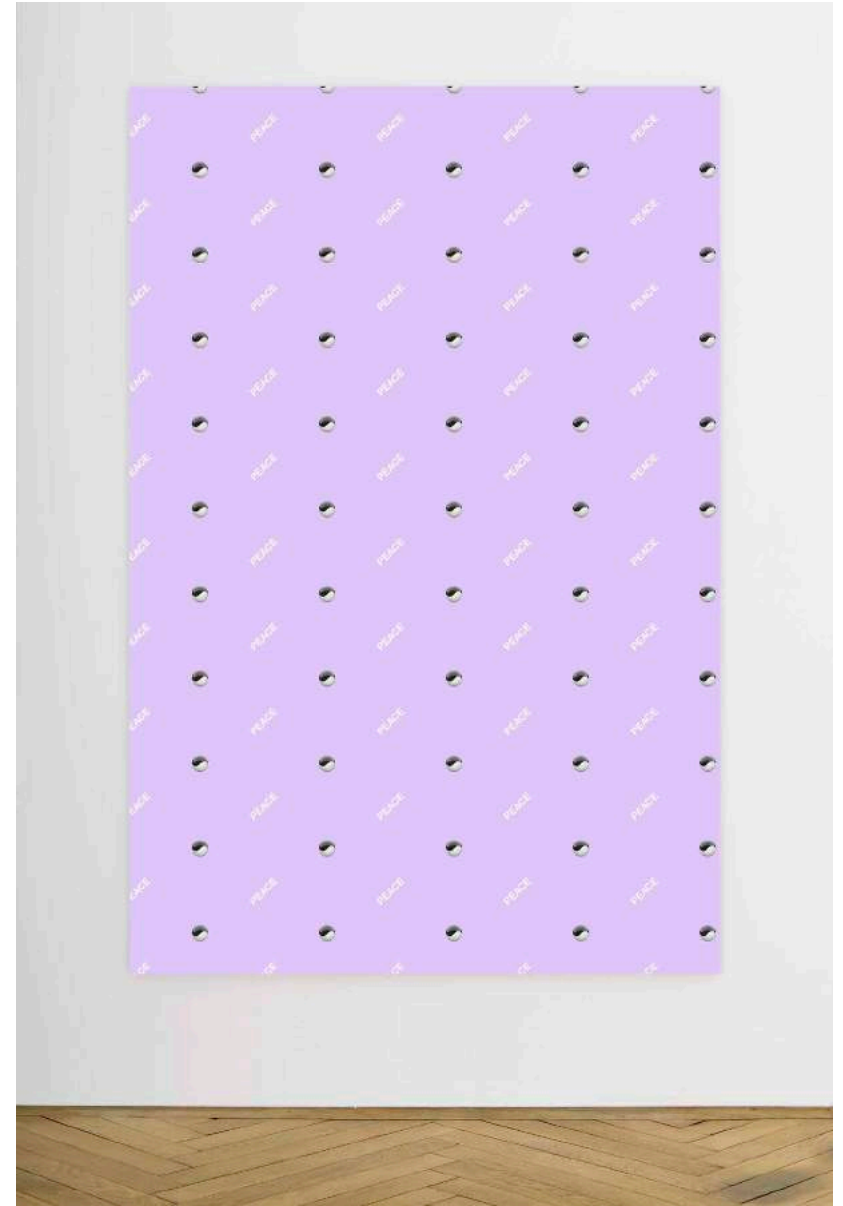
of generic forms. Generic and ubiquitous forms arise from the tendencies of social matter; the same is true for step and repeat banners themselves: Branding is an ecological object that inserts itself adaptively into various environments as a population of varied instances. Si-Qin is interested in what attracts broad sections of society to specific forms and subjects, and in biological and evolutionary theory as it relates to commercial aesthetics.



Step and Repeat, 2016
Inkjet print on aluminium sandwich panel
210 x 140 x 3 cm / 82 x 55 x 1 in



Step and Repeat, 2016
Inkjet print on aluminium sandwich panel
210 x 140 x 3 cm / 82 x 55 x 1 in



Step and Repeat, 2016
Inkjet print on aluminium sandwich panel
210 x 140 x 3 cm / 82 x 55 x 1 in



Step and Repeat, 2016
Inkjet print on aluminium sandwich panel
210 x 140 x 3 cm / 82 x 55 x 1 in



Step and Repeat, 2016
Inkjet print on aluminium sandwich panel
210 x 140 x 3 cm / 82 x 55 x 1 in



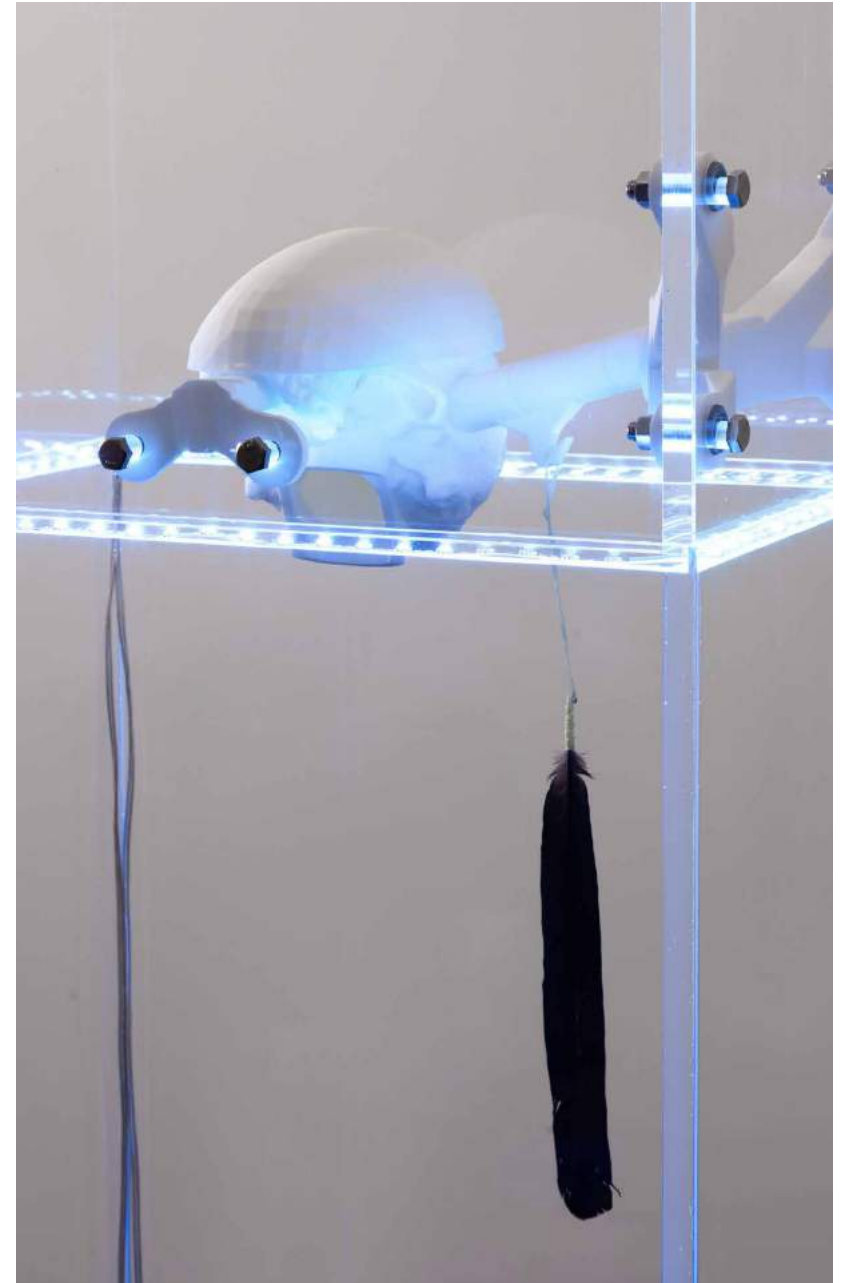
Step and Repeat, 2016
Inkjet print on aluminium sandwich panel
210 x 140 x 3 cm / 82 x 55 x 1 in



Step and Repeat, 2016
Inkjet print on aluminium sandwich panel
210 x 140 x 3 cm / 82 x 55 x 1 in



Premier Machinic Funerary X2: Homo Sapien, 2015
Plexiglass vitrine, aluminium plinth, LED light system, 3-D printed skull,
stainless steel screws, feather and synthetic sinew
173 x 40 x 26 cm / 68 x 15.7 x 10.2 in





Installation view
Everything's
Andrea Rosen Gallery, New York, 2015



Installation view
Recent Horizons
Société, Berlin, 2015



Population, 2015
LED video panels, fiberglass synthetic rocks
8 min., no audio, unique



Affect, 2015
LED video panels, fibreglass synthetic rocks
8 min., no audio, unique



Installation view
Biogenic Mineral
Magician Space, Beijing, 2015



Biogenic Mineral, 2015

Timur Si-Qin's work revolves between the transformation of material and matter. This body of recent work explores more closely inspiration taken from China, a place he shares a blood relationship with, envisioning the country as an immense super processor - one that incessantly draws raw material from all over the word transforming them into other material forms.

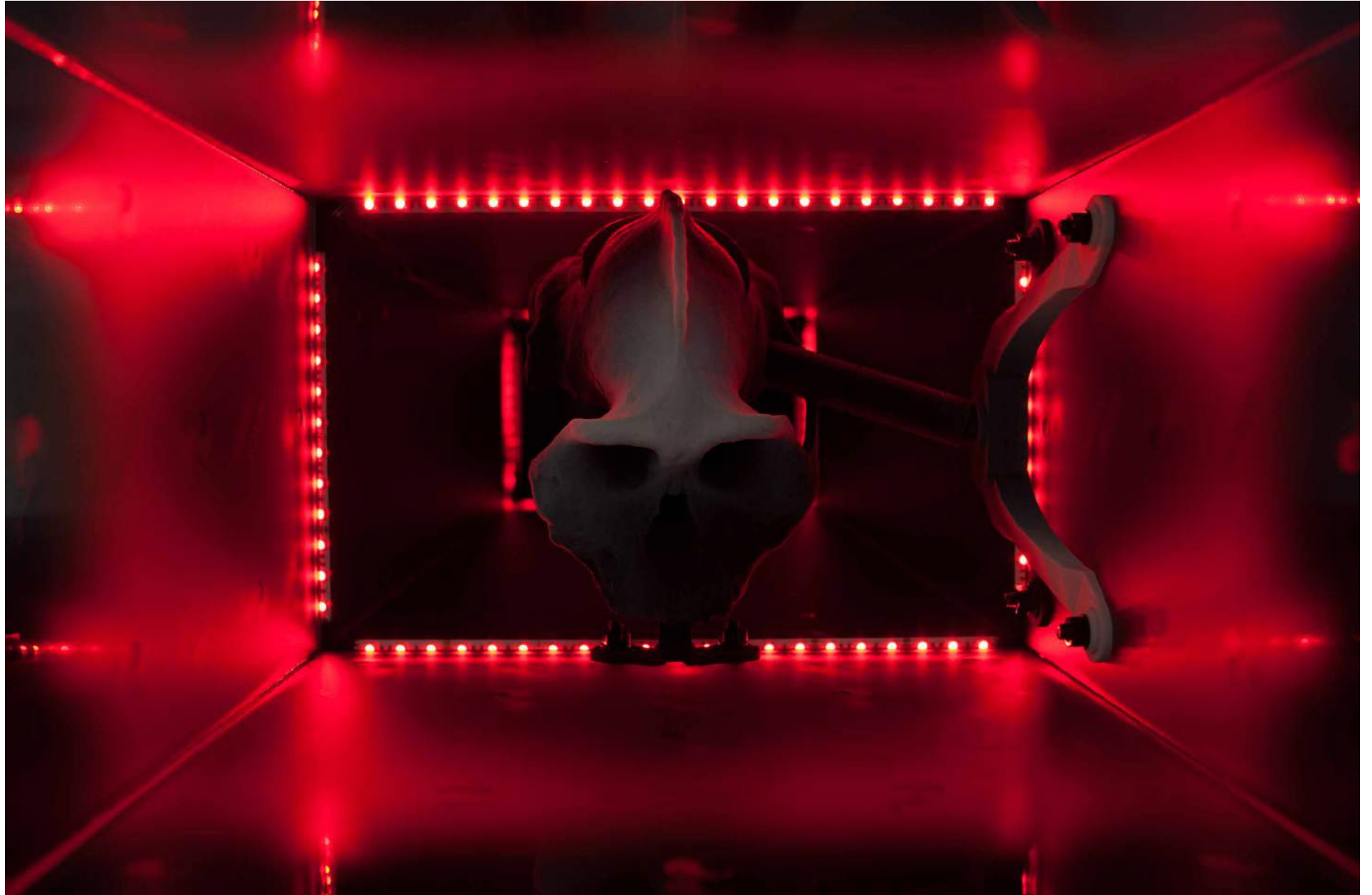
In previous projects, the artist has regularly adopted contemporary modes of commercial operations such as branding, commercial photography, and advertising. 'PEACE' is a brand the artist initiated in recent years for his exhibitions, the brand image incorporates the PEACE slogan with a white and grey Taoist Taijii symbol. For his solo exhibition in Beijing, Si-Qin mimics New York fashion brand Hood by Air's sub-brand HBA, creating his own TBP (Truth by Peace) evoking K-Pop culture, as well as the production of large-scale commercial images. For Si-Qin, the adaptation of the brand undergoes a transformation similar to metamorphic processes found in the natural world – they all

derive from matter shifting through phase transitions from one attractor to another.

Constituting the major component of the TBP brand in material form, the main hall features a set of rock-like sculptures fabricated in a factory located in Heiqiao Village, Beijing. Similar to how marble is the metamorphic version of limestone composed of ancient sea life, in the broader sense, minerals can also be regarded as a product of geological evolution – a movement undergoing stages of heat and pressure through prolonged periods of time in order to yield a new form. The artist regards transformation within culture (with brands as a concrete example) as similarly a result of these complex movements compressed together by metamorphic processes. With this sculpture installation in the main hall, the artist has also fabricated octagonal structures lined with an LED light system – combining traditional and contemporary structures, these elements together play the role of 'visual attractors', directing the movement of culture or a 'phase transition'.



Installation view
Premier Machinic Funerary: Part II
Carl Kostyál, London, 2014



Premier Machinic Funerary: Part II, 2014

"The mirror is thoroughly egoless and mindless. If a flower comes it reflects a flower, if a bird comes it reflects a bird. It shows a beautiful object as beautiful, an ugly object as ugly. Everything is revealed as it is. There is no discriminating mind or self-consciousness on the part of the mirror. If something comes, the mirror reflects; if it disappears the mirror just lets it disappear . . . no traces of anything are left behind." (Zenkei Shibayma, On Zazen Wasan, Kyoto, 1967)

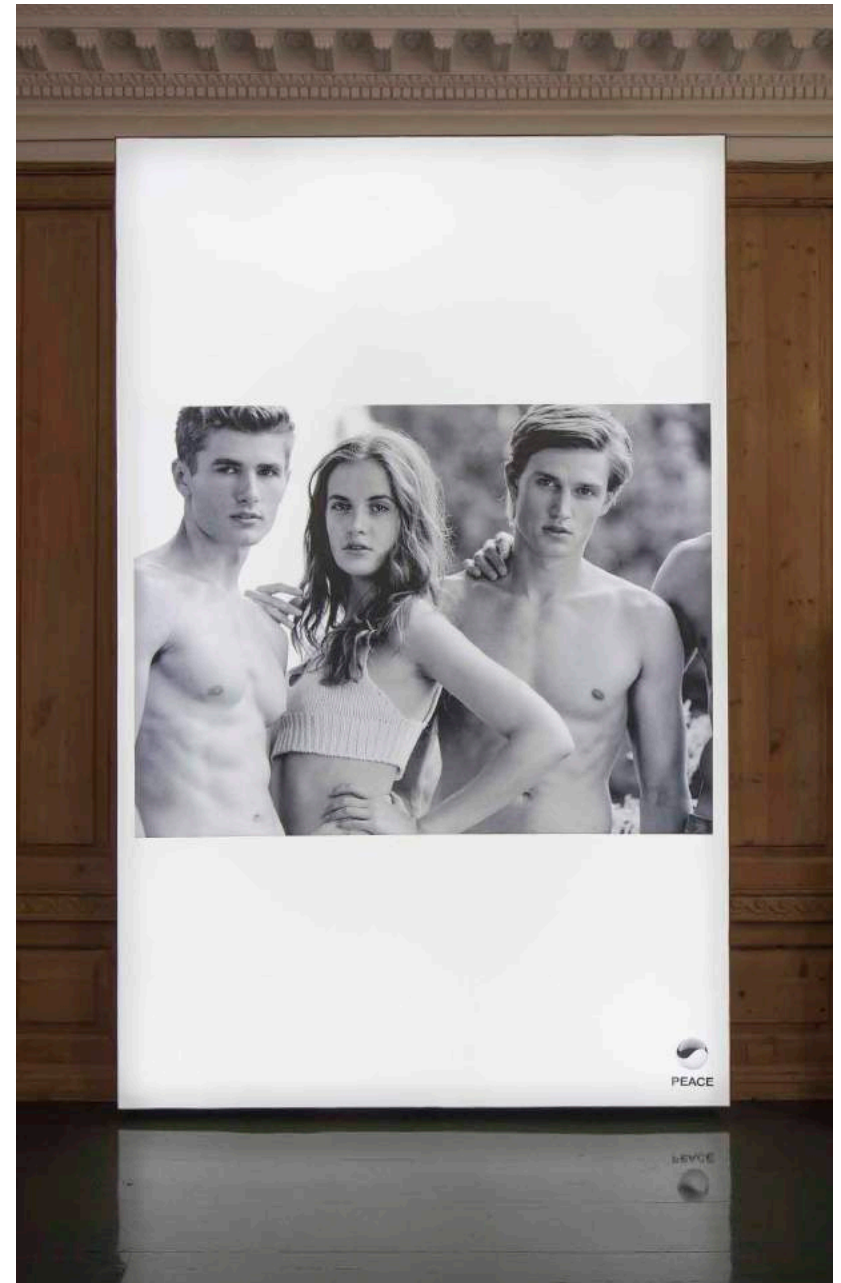
The Premier Machinic Funerary Part II is the second installation in a series depicting a form of hyper-commercial ancestral worship. The installations present abstracted funerals for the 3D printed scans of ancient hominid fossils set in contemporary retail or commercial environments.

Arising before art, and marking a transition in the emergence of humans, intentional burial is the oldest of all rituals, as well as evidence of a complex cognition capable of the abstraction required for thinking about the afterlife. Dating back 60,000 years it has also been observed

among the closely related Neanderthals, who decorated their transitions into the afterlife with flowers and antlers.

Perhaps more appropriately understood as anti-funerals, these installations mark the re-emergence of a lifeform as it transitions through various phases from organism to fossil, or from CT scan to 3D print. Phase transitions are said to occur at critical thresholds, switching a physical system from one state to another, like the critical points of temperature at which water changes from solid to liquid, or from liquid to gas. These critical thresholds structure the topological space of possibilities within any physical system and thereby define its expression into the physical world.

In this installation, the phase transitions undergone by this Homo Habilis (1.9 mya) and Paranthropus Aethiopicus (2.52 mya), which themselves originate at the threshold of humanness, provide an example of how being itself exists primarily in the topological realm of possibilities, and only in the secondary emerging into the physical through a given media.





Installation view
Premier Machinic Funerary: Part I
Taipei Biennial, 2014

慎終追遠
民德歸厚矣





Installation view
Premier Machinic Funerary: Prologue
Liste Basel, 2014

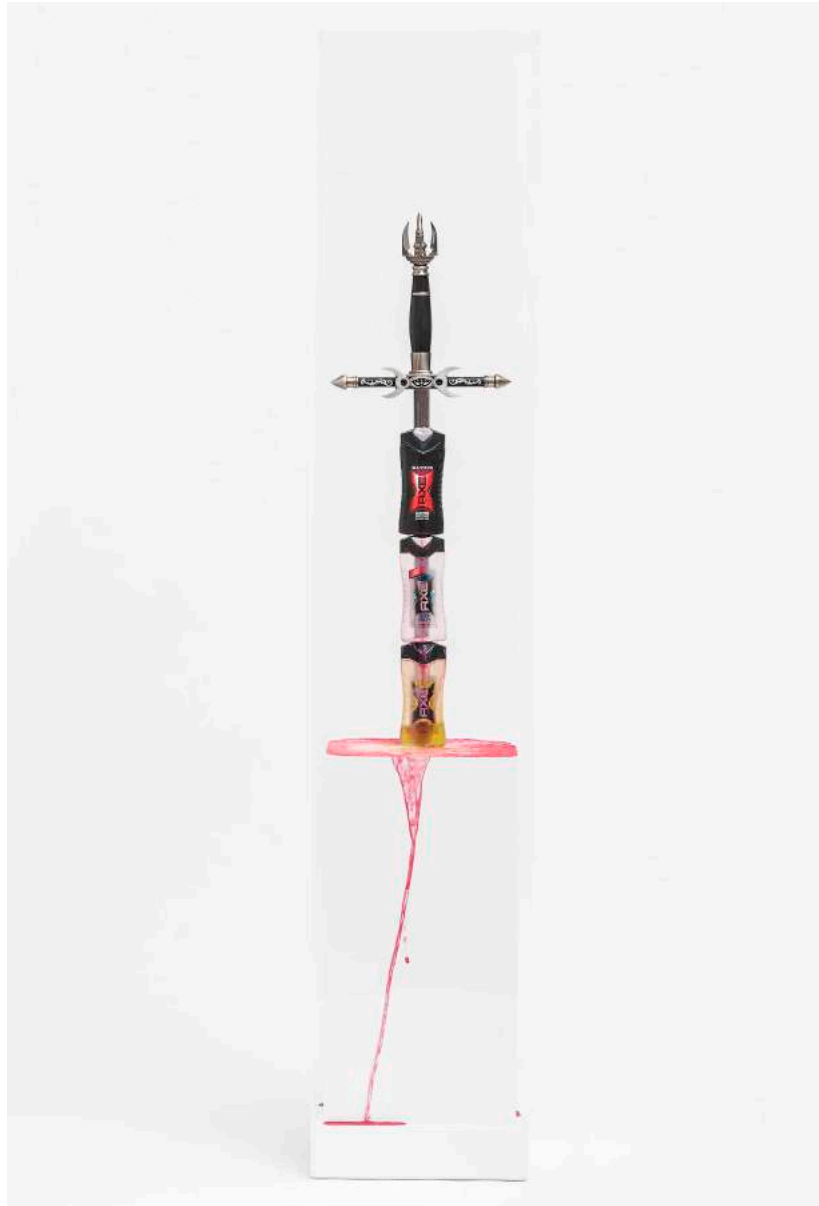


Installation view
False Optimism
Crawford Art Gallery, Cork, 2013

Axe Effext, 2011–2013

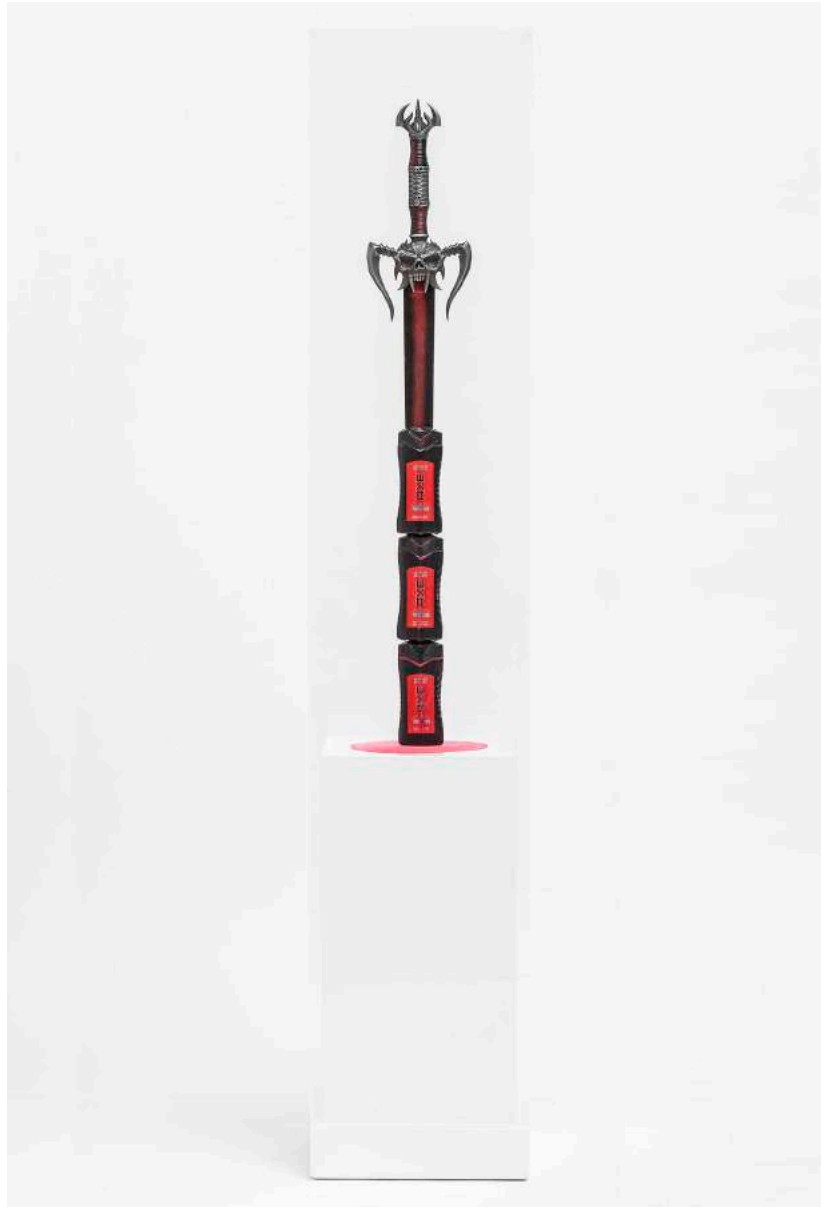
"The Axe effect is the internationally recognized name for the increased attention Axe-wearing males receive from eager, and attractive female pursuers. Regardless of where you live, you can get the Axe-Effect by going to a store near you and purchasing one of our fine products." - Unilever

The Axe effect sculptures are objects that embody the system attractors of the contingent epic of evolution. The arms-race and the mating-call violently and erotically interpenetrate in the guise of a product-placement (an evolved strategy in itself) releasing synthetic pheromones to further compete for space and attention. The variations in forms of designed products are testament to the divergent pathways of bio-morphological memes and cultural norms, having undergone a state-change (in the neo-materialist sense) from evolutionary strategy to marketable ergonomics. The intricate patterns of fluid dynamics are a direct display of the beauty of contingency, a beauty embodied by the mechanisms of evolution itself.



Untitled, 2014
Sword, Axe shower gel, vitrine
176 x 34 x 34 cm / 69 x 13.5 x 13.5 in





Untitled, 2014
Sword, Axe shower gel, vitrine
176 x 34 x 34 cm / 69 x 13.5 x 13.5 in





Untitled, 2014
Sword, Axe shower gel, vitrine
176 x 34 x 34 cm / 69 x 13.5 x 13.5 in





Installation view
Premier Machinic Funerary: Prologue
Liste Basel, 2014



Installation view
Basin of Attraction
Bonner Kunstverein, Bonn, 2013

Basin of Attraction, 2013

The corporate image owes its morphology to the (temporarily) stable-attractors of its instinctual and habituated affects. The commercial realm more so than any other domain of society is where the most research is done into the construction of affect: How humans process and respond to images of consumable goods and people. Because businesses depend on images to communicate to consumers in order to survive - vast sums are spent to study, map and sculpt the (real) virtual architecture of the affective qualities of images.

This virtual environment hosting and generating the image attractor is inhabited by the economic, the political and the vestigial. In identifying these attractors and hyper-framing them to the Nth degree, we reach an often uncomfortable conflation of criticality and complicity. An uncanny valley where the dissected resembles the exalted.

However synthetic seeming, these manifestations remain immanent to the compositions of a contingent nature like the bodies of plants and animals, the flows of rivers, or the geologies of mountains. Not a balanced and harmonious nature, but rather whirlpools of temporary stability within a chaotic and disinterested maelstrom of fluids, informations, and genes.

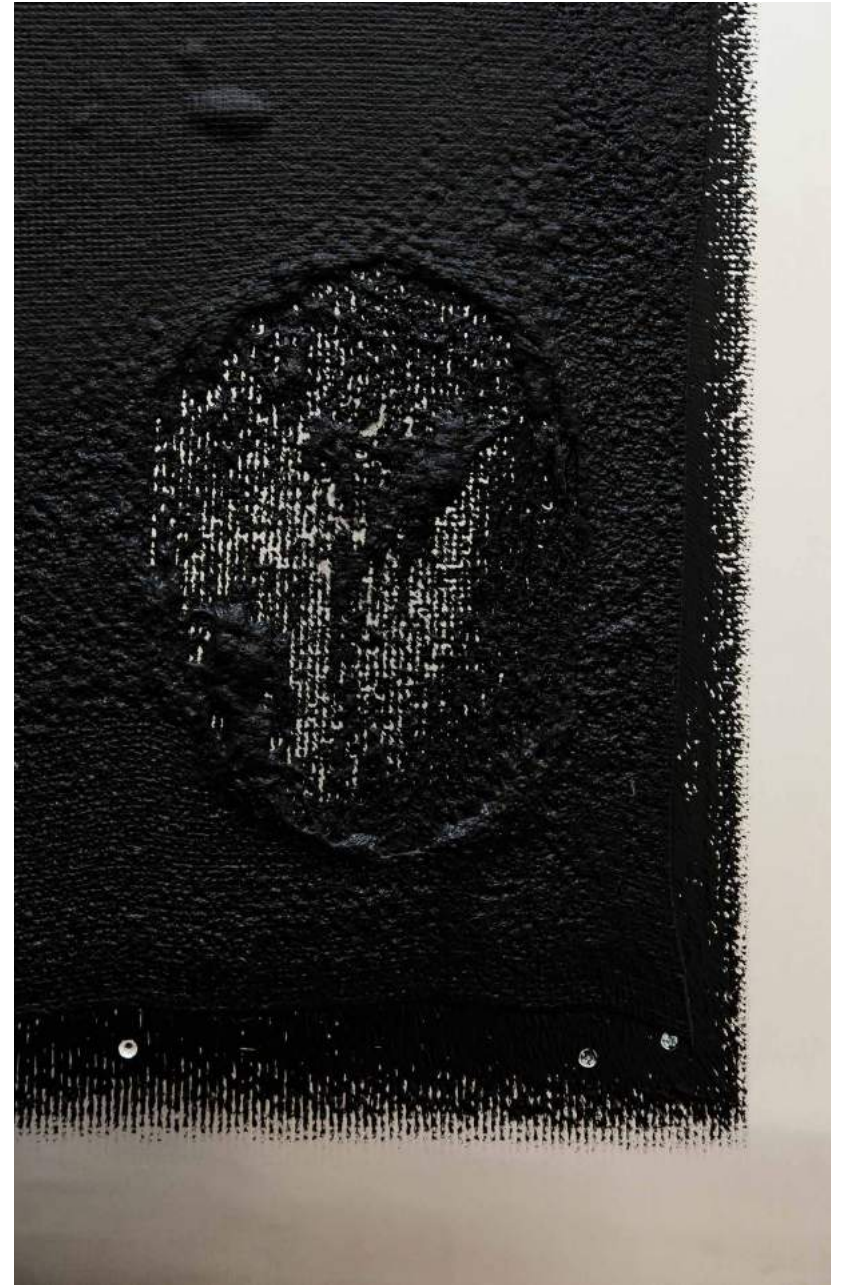


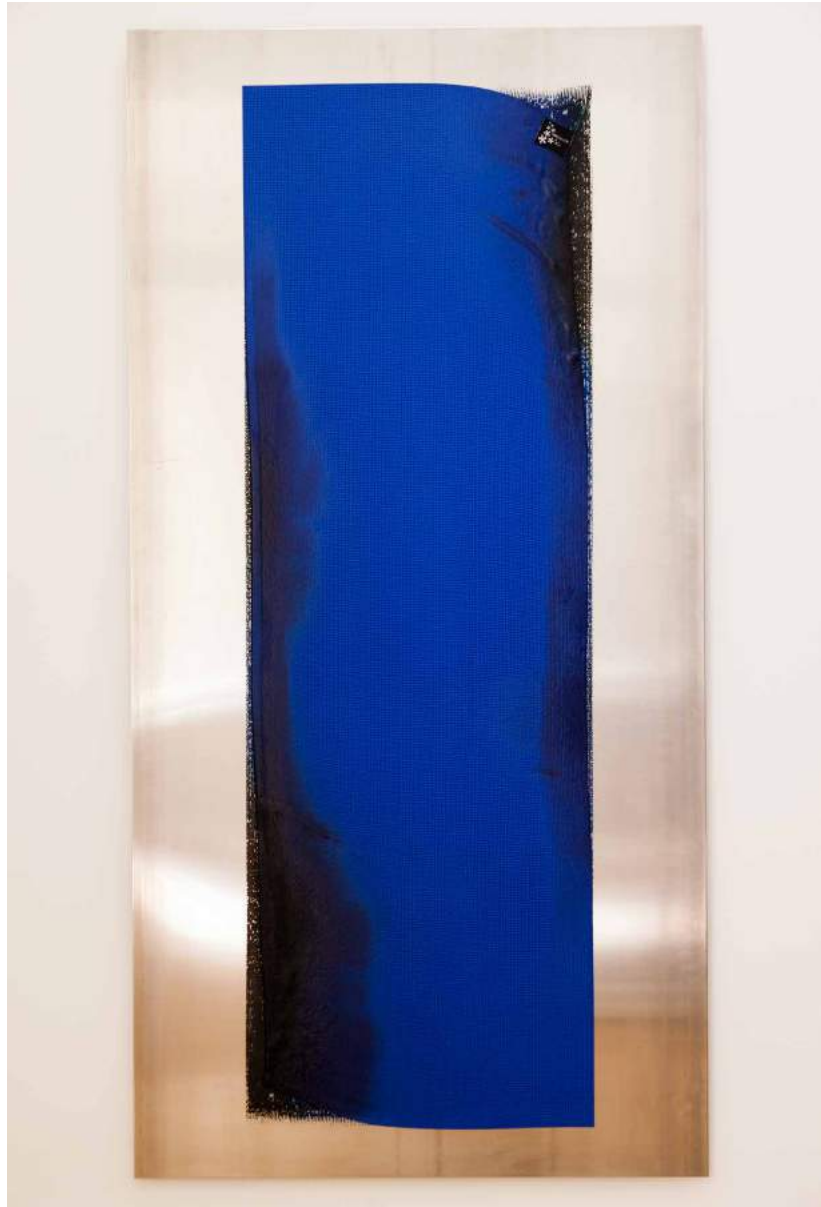


Installation view
Infinite Surrender, Focused Control
Soci t , Berlin, 2013

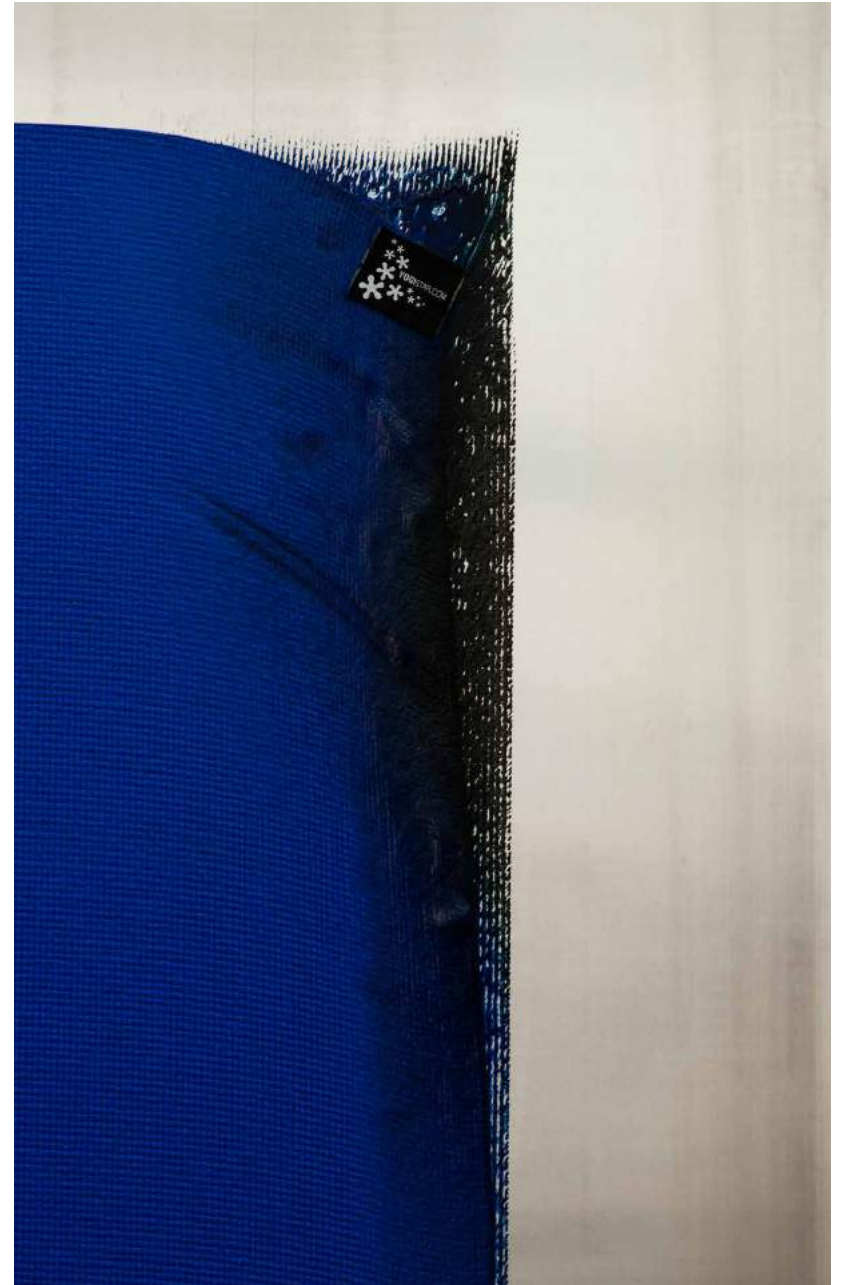


Melted Yoga Mat (Black 1), 2013
Yoga mat on aluminium panel
200 x 100 cm / 79 x 39.5 in



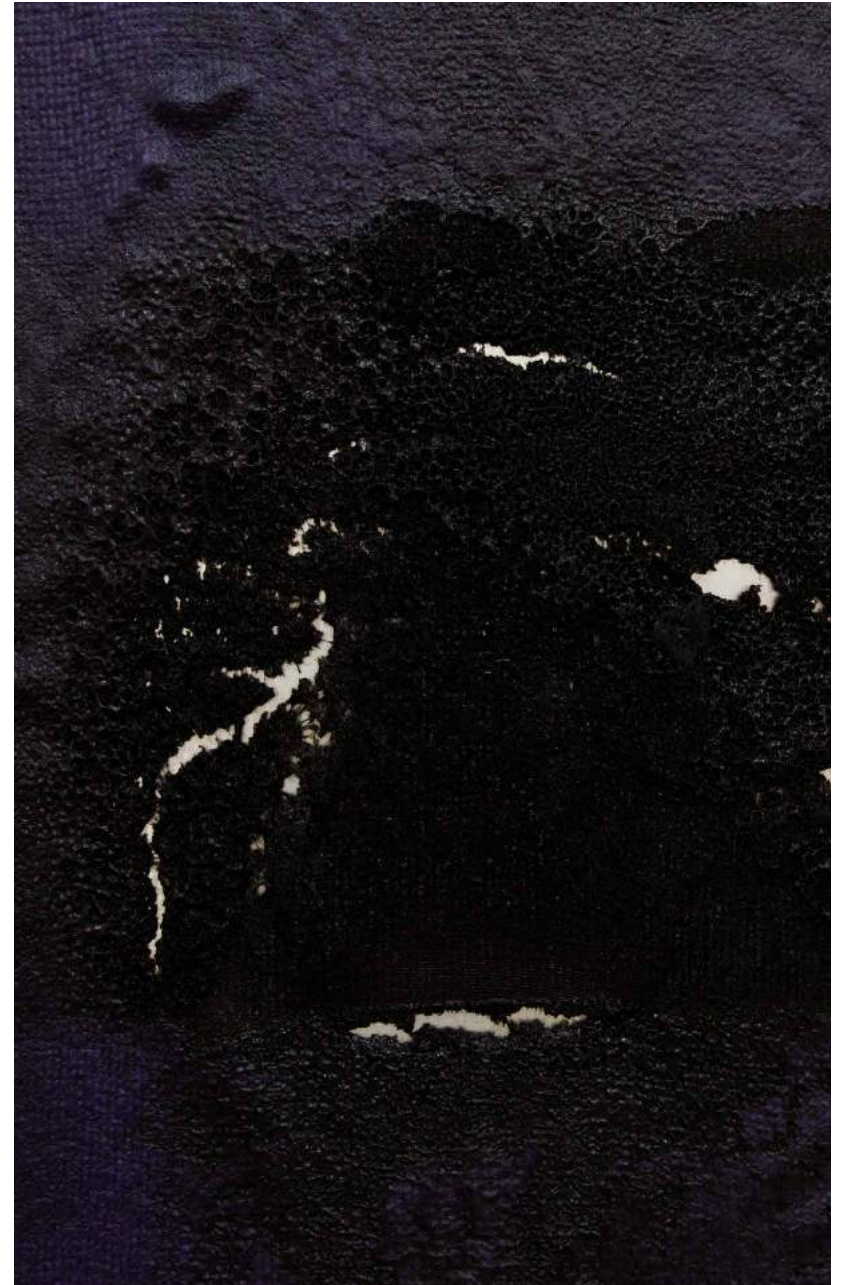


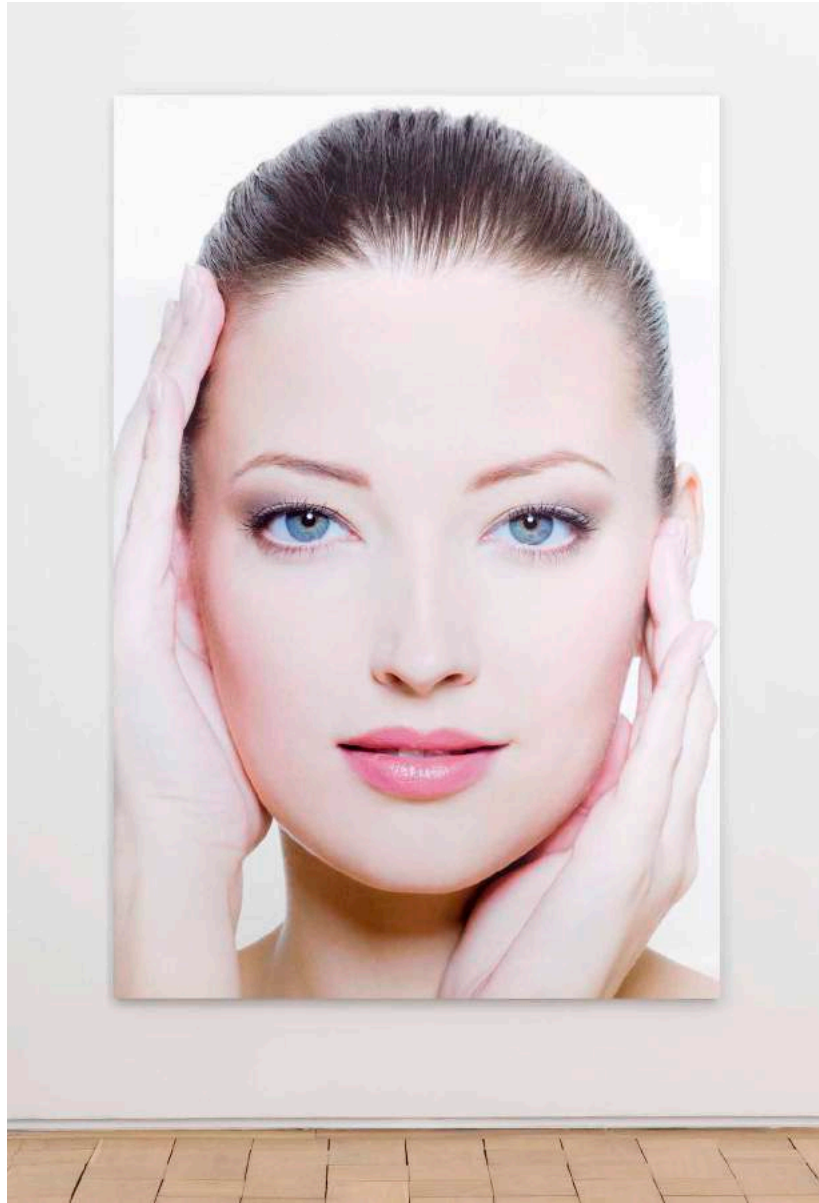
Melted Yoga Mat (Dark Blue 7), 2013
Yoga mat on aluminium panel
200 x 100 cm / 79 x 39.5 in



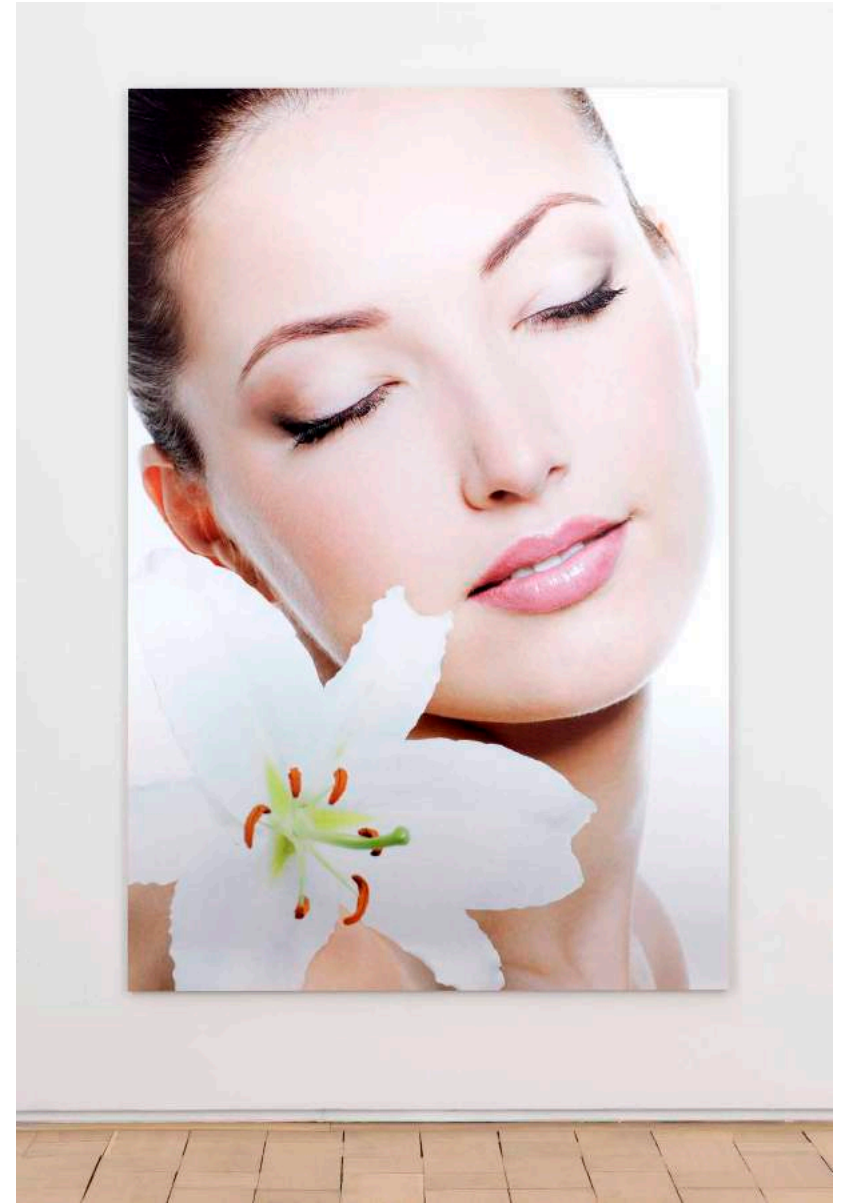


Melted Yoga Mat (Purple 5), 2013
Yoga mat on aluminium panel
200 x 100 cm / 79 x 39.5 in

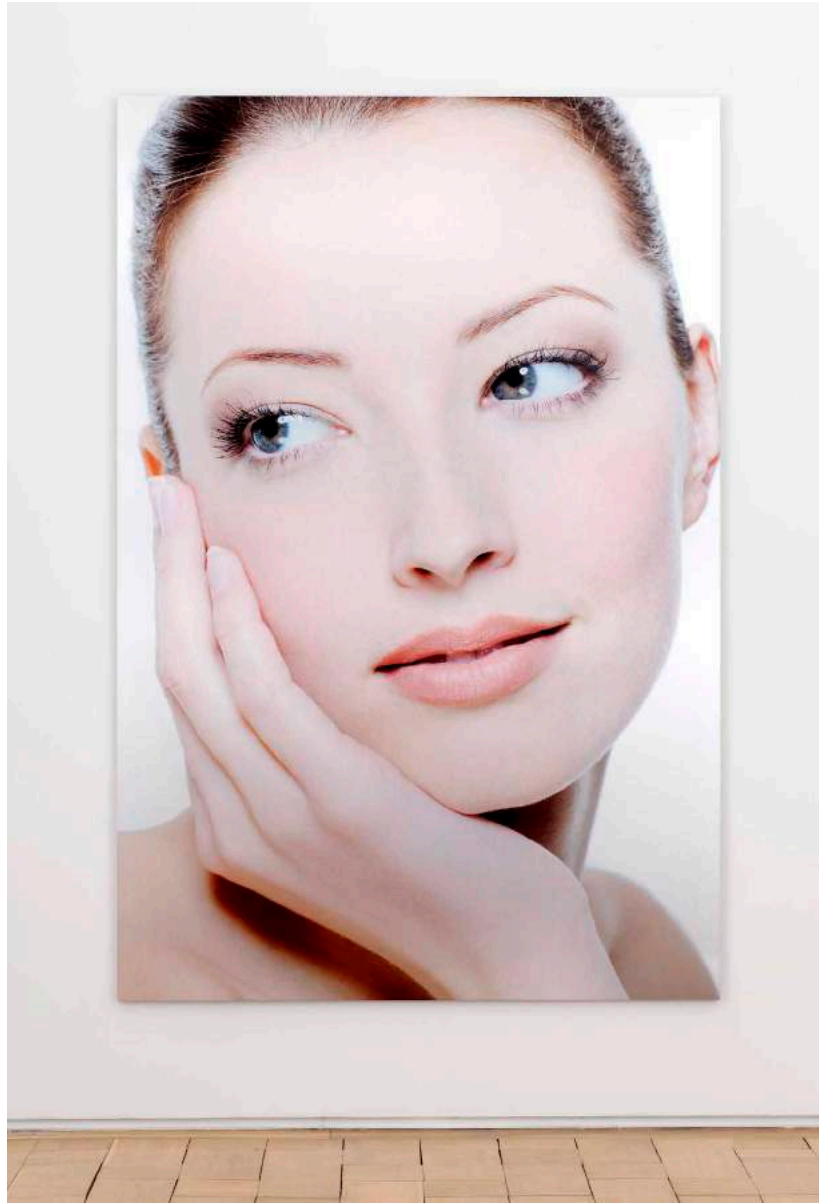




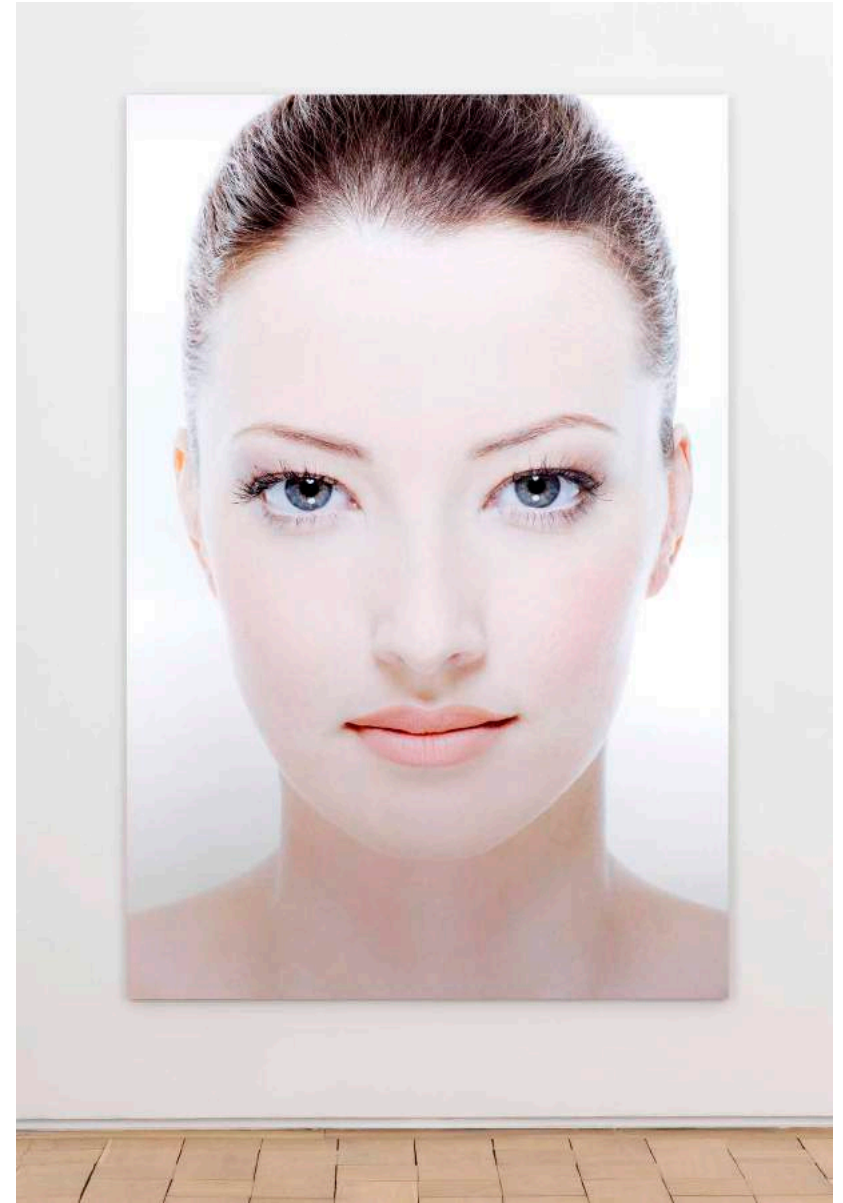
Untitled, 2013
Inkjet print on aluminium sandwich panel
210 x 140 x 3 cm / 82 x 55 x 1 in



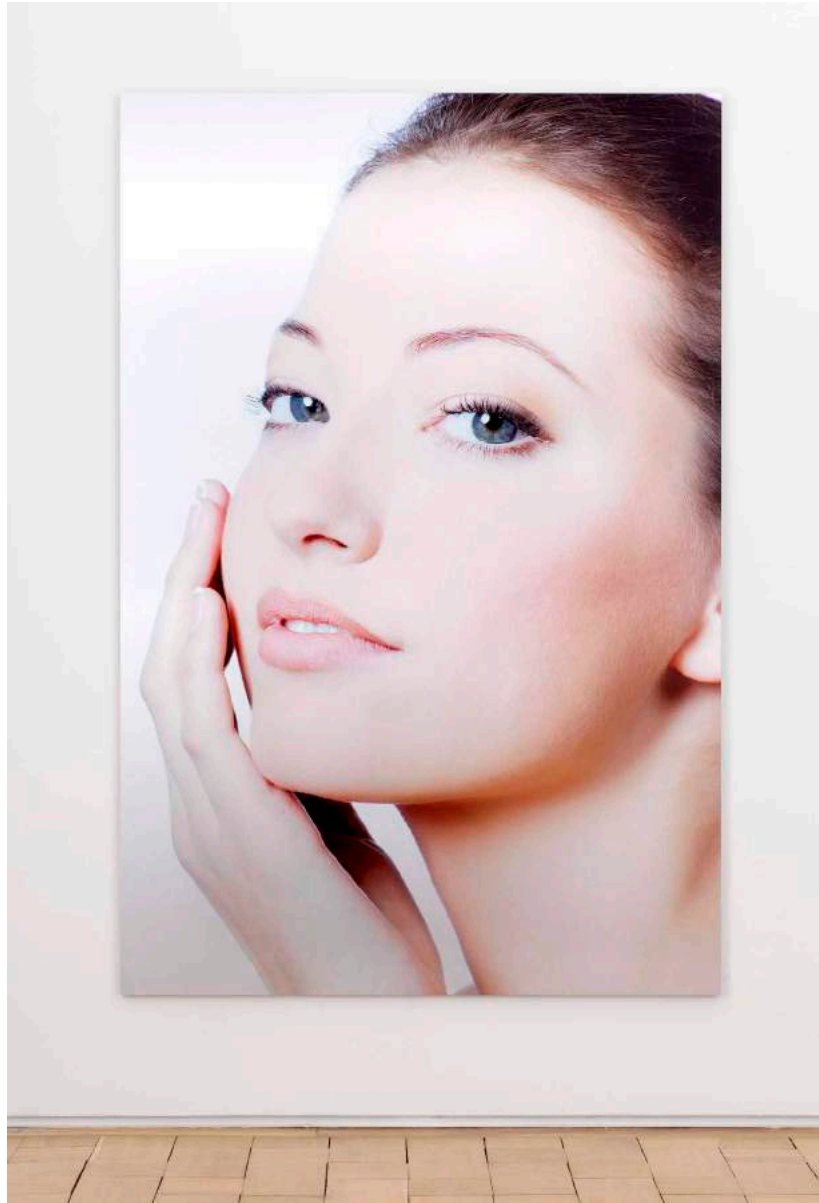
Untitled, 2013
Inkjet print on aluminium sandwich panel
210 x 140 x 3 cm / 82 x 55 x 1 in



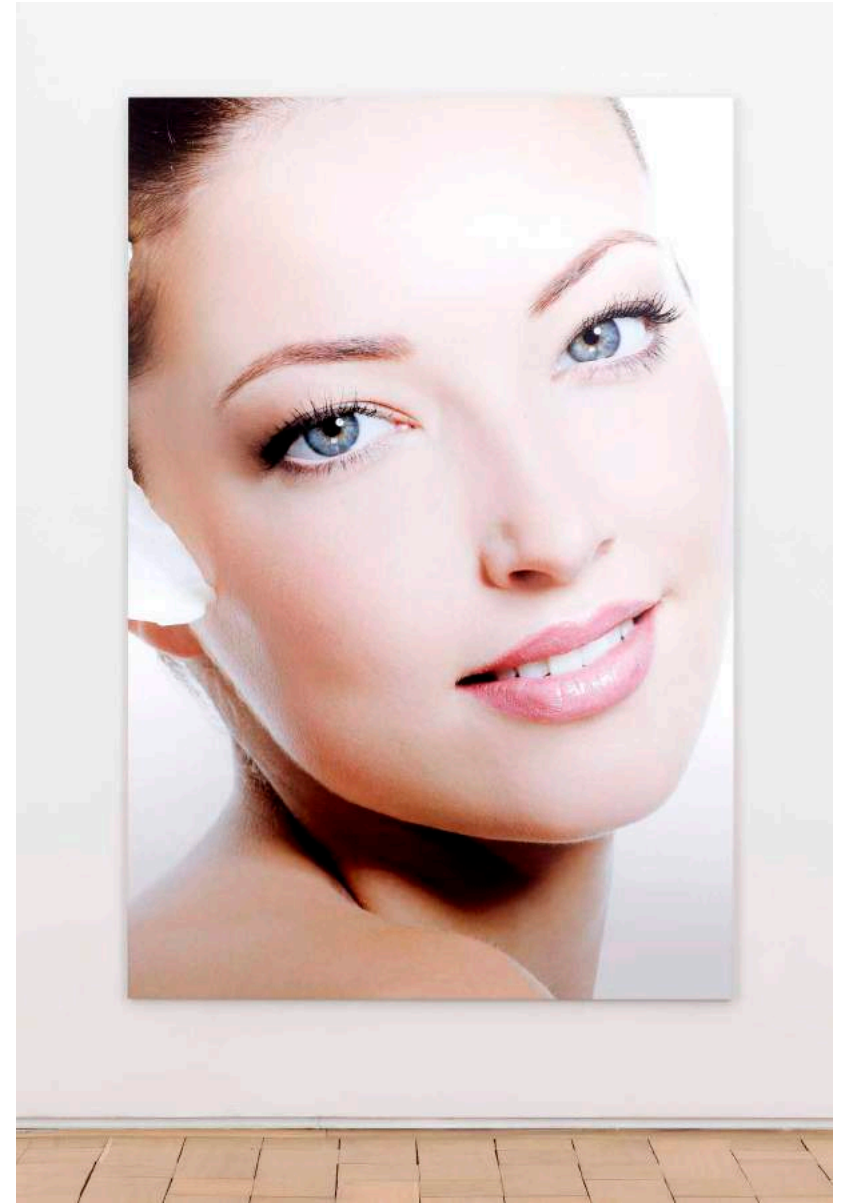
Untitled, 2013
Inkjet print on aluminium sandwich panel
210 x 140 x 3 cm / 82 x 55 x 1 in



Untitled, 2013
Inkjet print on aluminium sandwich panel
210 x 140 x 3 cm / 82 x 55 x 1 in



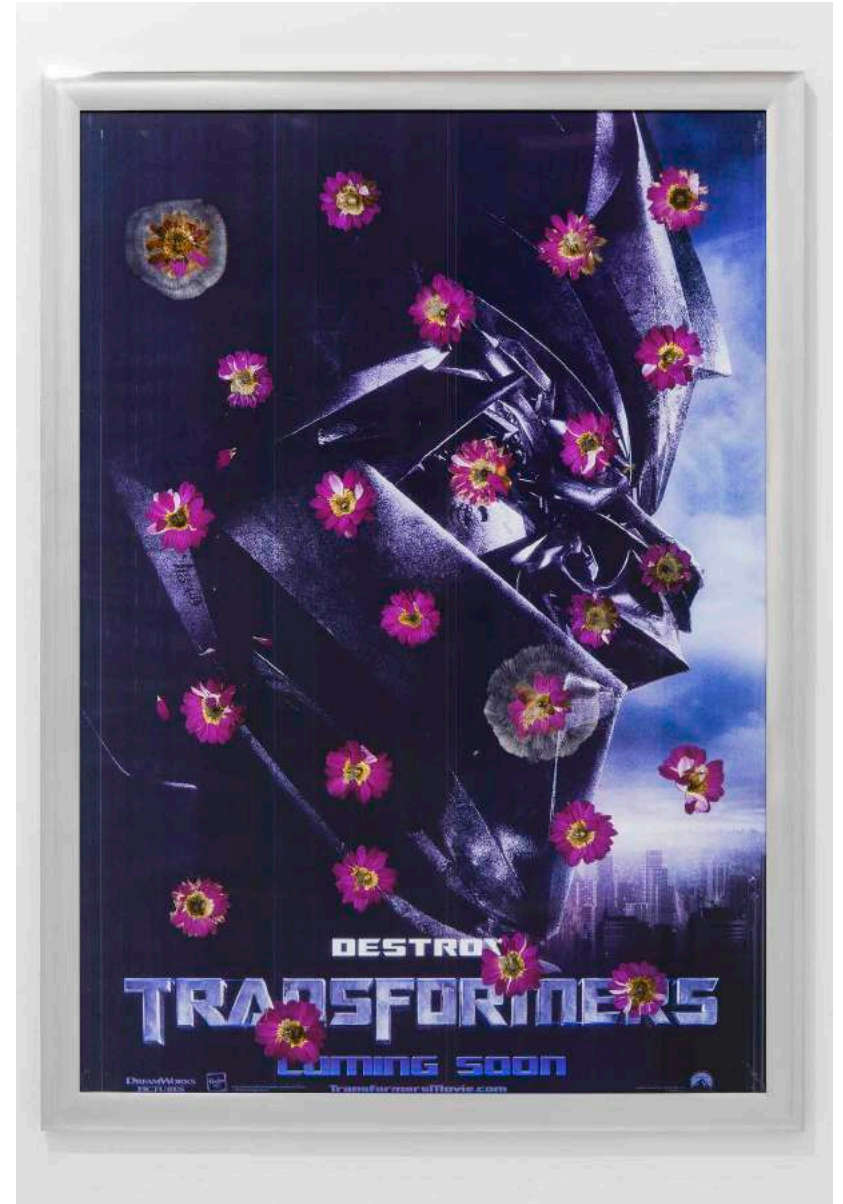
Untitled, 2013
Inkjet print on aluminium sandwich panel
210 x 140 x 3 cm / 82 x 55 x 1 in



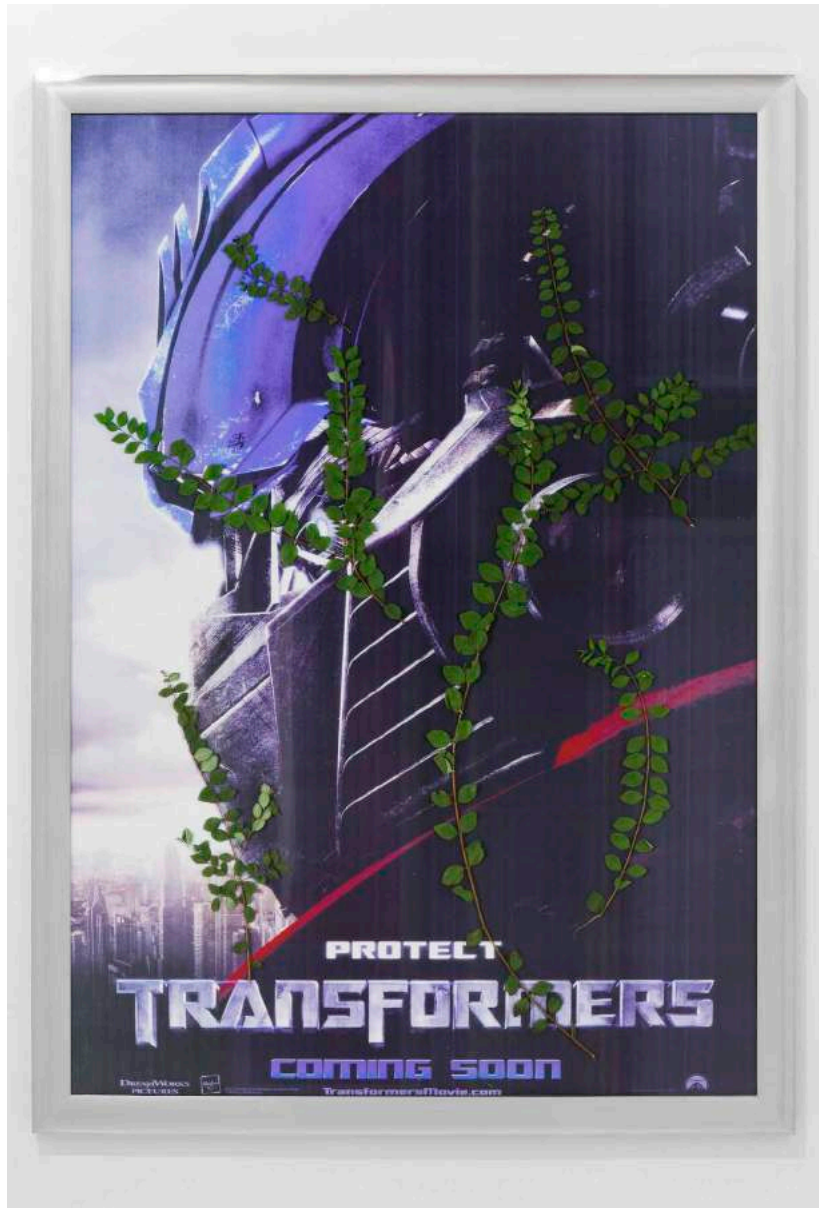
Untitled, 2013
Inkjet print on aluminium sandwich panel
210 x 140 x 3 cm / 82 x 55 x 1 in



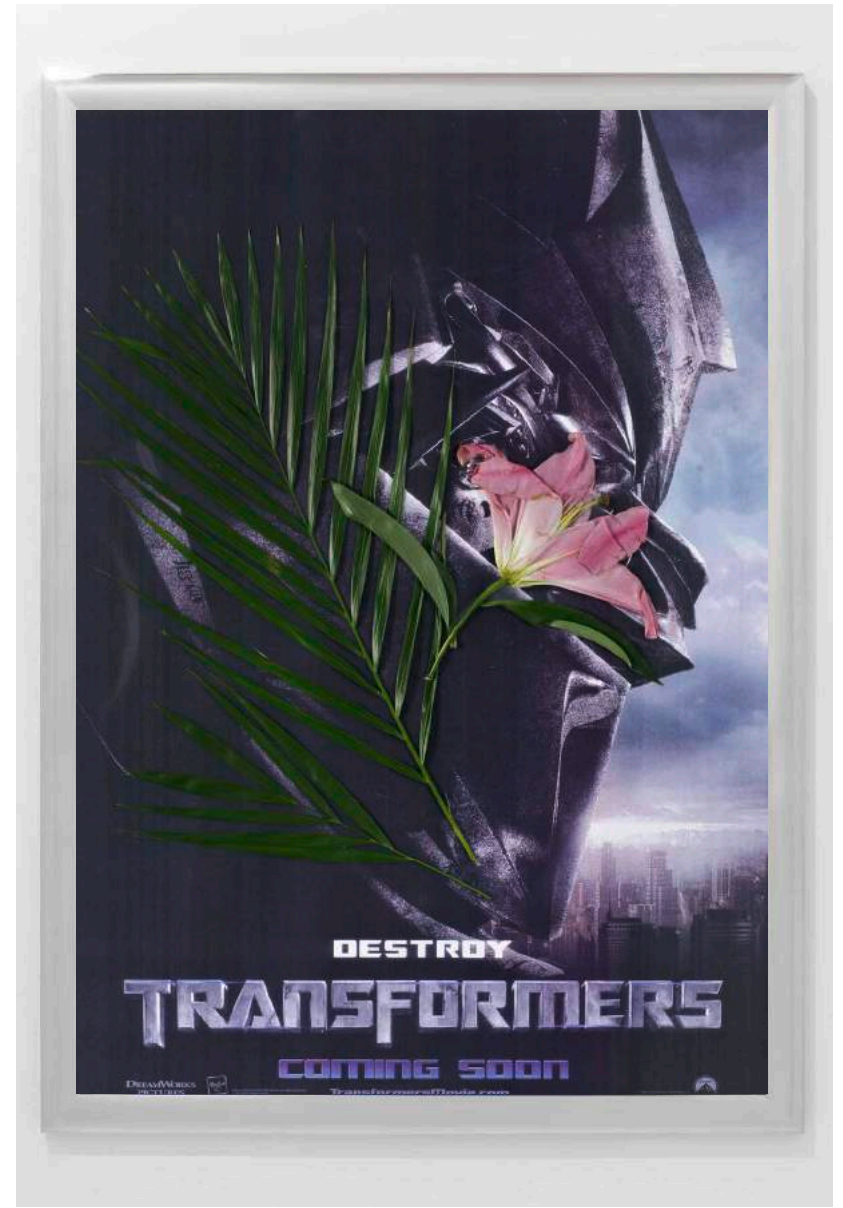
Untitled, 2011
Inkjet print, plants and aluminium frame
104 x 74 cm / 41 x 29 1/4 in



Untitled, 2011
Inkjet print, plants and aluminium frame
104 x 74 cm / 41 x 29 1/4 in



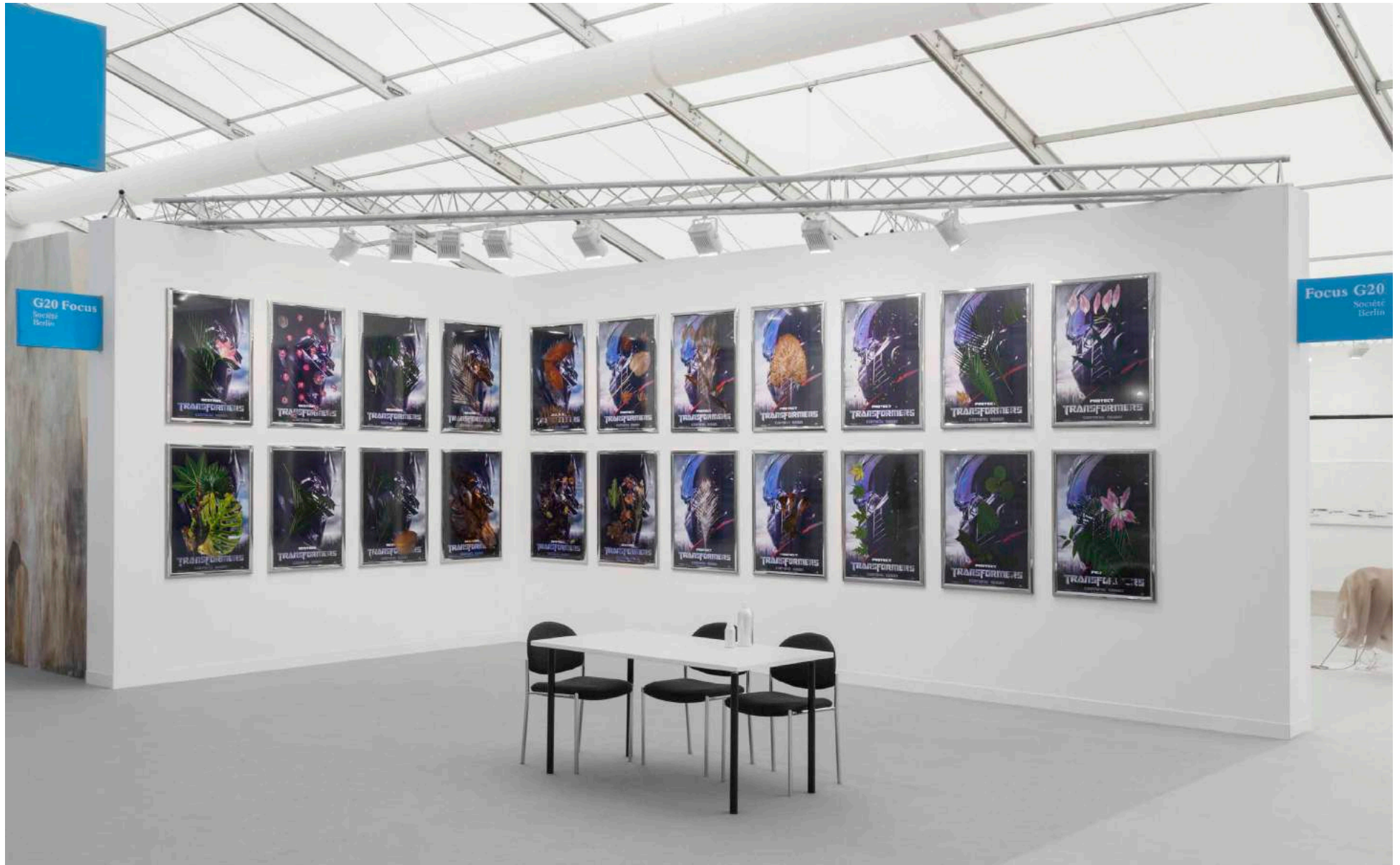
Untitled, 2011
Inkjet print, plants and aluminium frame
104 x 74 cm / 41 x 29 1/4 in



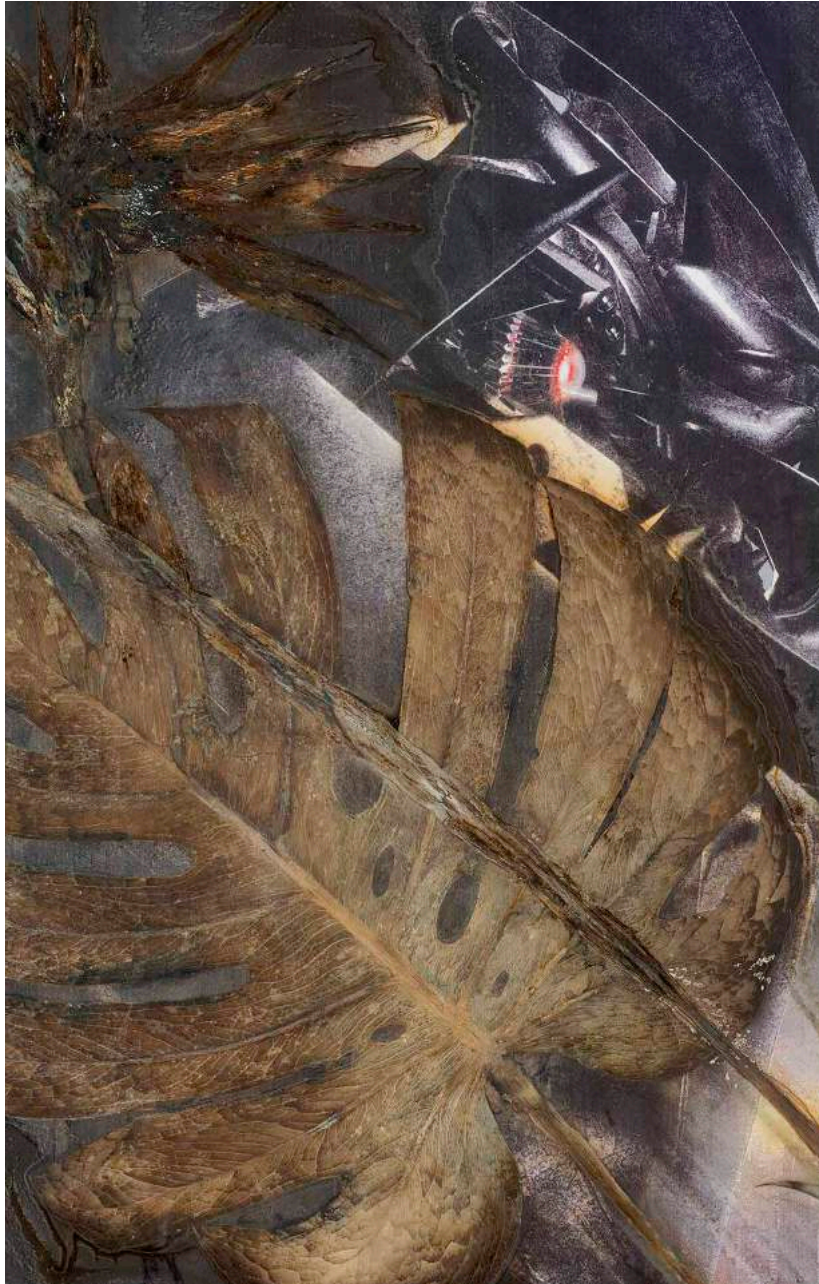
Untitled, 2011
Inkjet print, plants and aluminium frame
104 x 74 cm / 41 x 29 1/4 in



Installation view
Mainstream
Société, Berlin, 2011



Installation view
Frieze London
London, 2016



Transformers, 2011

Artforum described Si-Qin's 2011 exhibition *Mainstream*, his first at Société and the first time the artist exhibited his Transformers work: "The artist lined the gallery's two rooms with thirty-two computer printout copies of posters for the movie *Transformers* (2007) and overlaid each with plant leaves of varying shapes, sizes, and species. [...] Nature and culture, here framed in stark contrast to one another, nevertheless exist on the same plane. In fact, the logic of mechanical reproduction and the aesthetic of mass culture constitute our contemporary natural order. Si-Qin's art, in the free rein that it takes on culture, simultaneously embodies the act of consumption and the ethos and forms of digital media. Contemporary society's dissociation from a state of nature can be seen in the screen-tested aesthetic regime of *Transformers*, where lines deriving from American car production designate Optimus Prime as the kindred, benevolent protector, and organic design elements identify Megatron as an evil, foreign body threatening destruction."

In the run-up to that exhibition, Si-Qin photographed each of the 32 collages, some more than once, and some at different stages in their development. This display consists of 22 of those photographs mounted in chrome frames; the collages' frames are aluminum. Over the course of the 2011 exhibition, the plant matter

in the collages deteriorated—wilted, browned, and began to rot, quickly, as organic matter tends to do, while the exhibition was still up. The collages incorporated the irreversible life cycle of consumption and planned obsolescence into their very nature. The second incarnation captures instances in the course of the collages' deterioration but also preserves the moment in which some of them were new, pristine—capturing the fantasy of newness through photography's arm's-length remove from reality.

In the years since 2011, Si-Qin has made work that exhibits an explicit relationship to Taoism, mainly through his incorporation of the Taiji into the PEACE visual identity with which he has branded many of his recent works. Si-Qin interprets the first line of the Tao—"The Tao is not the eternal Tao."—as meaning that nothing stays the same. No solution is ever an eternal solution. He sees the Western tradition of criticality as a conflation of truth and beauty with moral righteousness. From an Eastern perspective, right and wrong are more interconnected, mutually manifest, and situated beyond the reach of human notions of right and wrong. The *Transformers* works don't reference this tradition explicitly; the perspective is still nascent, emerging, in the work.



Untitled, 2011
Fujifilm Professional DPII glossy, chrome artist's frame
104 x 74 cm / 41 x 29 1/4 in



Untitled, 2011
Fujifilm Professional DPII glossy, chrome artist's frame
104 x 74 cm / 41 x 29 1/4 in



Untitled, 2011
Fujifilm Professional DPII glossy, chrome artist's frame
104 x 74 cm / 41 x 29 1/4 in



Untitled, 2011
Fujifilm Professional DPII glossy, chrome artist's frame
104 x 74 cm / 41 x 29 1/4 in

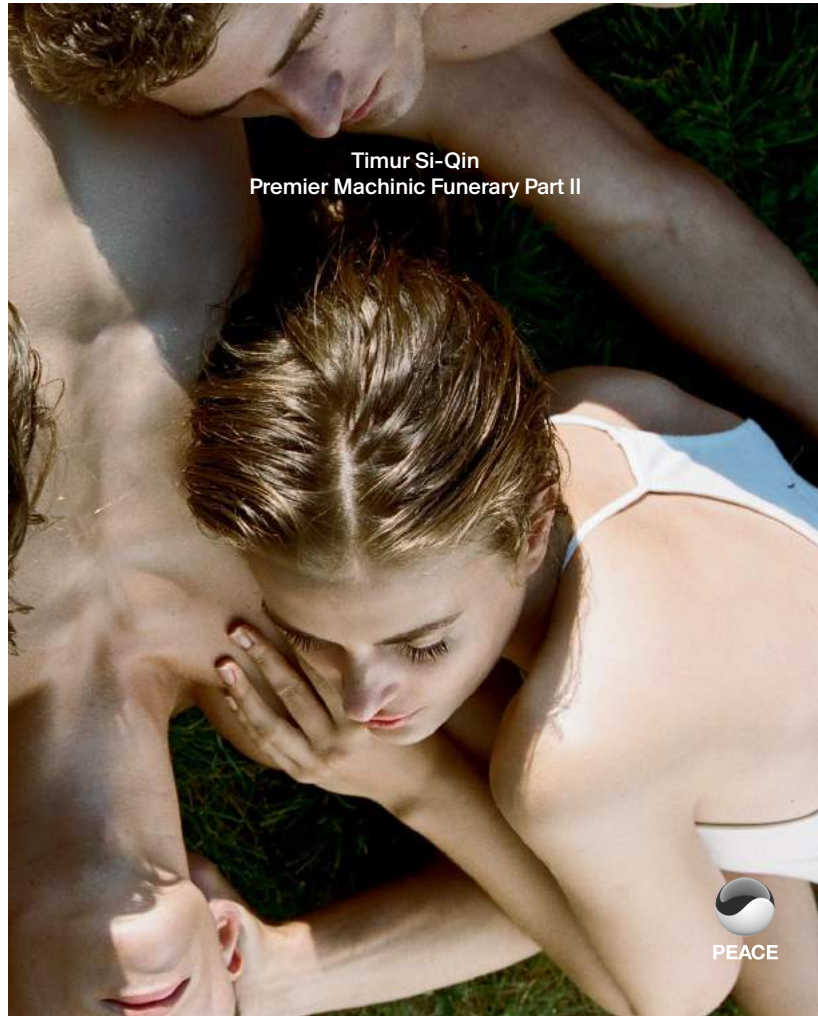


Timur Si-Qin
TRANSFORMERS

Photography: Uli Holz, Sebastian Schobbert
Design: Eric Wrenn Office, New York
Typeface: Linotype Helvetica Neue
Paper: Favini Bindakote, Arctic Matt
Production: Printmanagement Plitt, Oberhausen
Special thanks: Stephan Jansen
Edition of 500
Printed in Italy

Edition Société, Berlin 2016

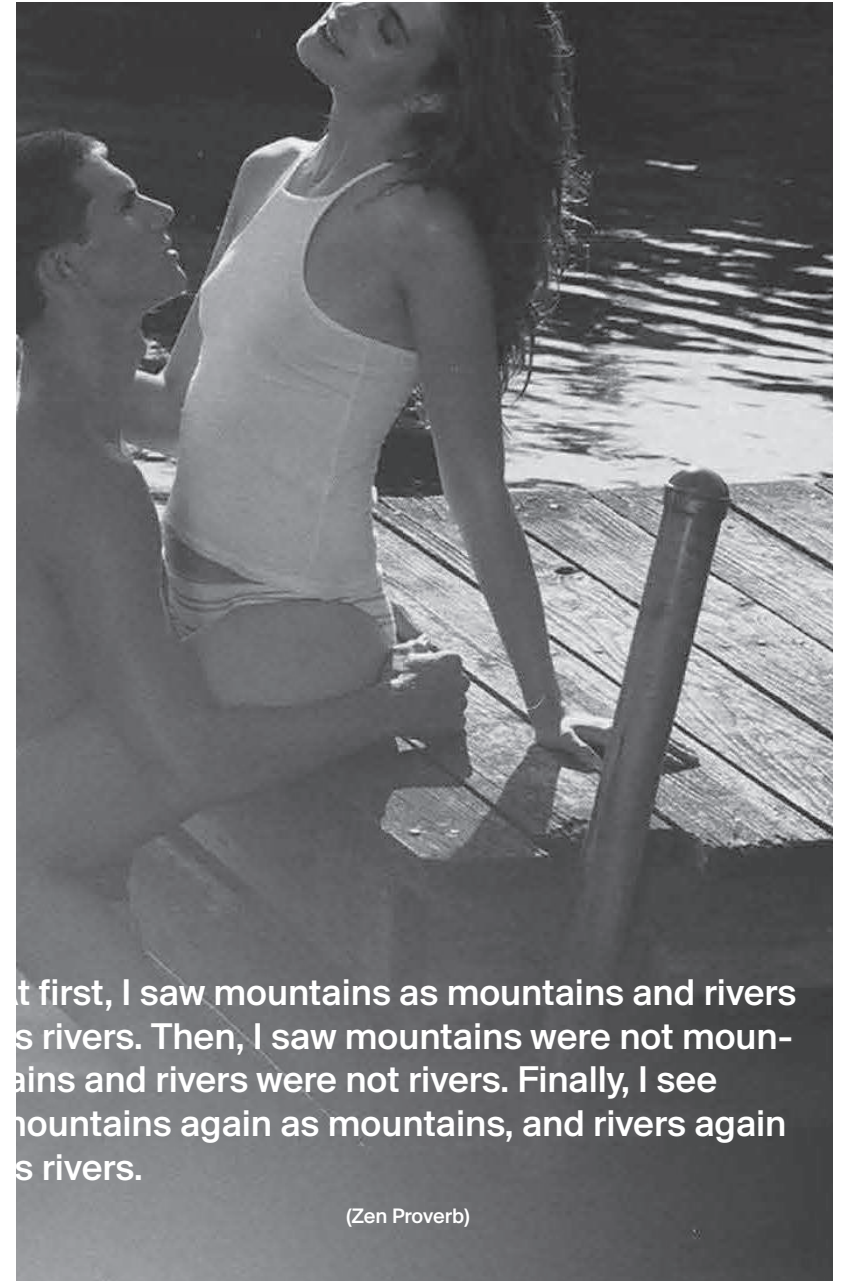




Timur Si-Qin
Premier Machinic Funerary Part II, 2014

Photography - Marissa Kaiser
Photoshoot Producer - Preston Chaunsumlit
Stylist - Mimi Kim
Hair - Anthony Payne
Make-up - Tracy Alfajora
Edition of 300

Edition Société, Berlin 2014



At first, I saw mountains as mountains and rivers as rivers. Then, I saw mountains were not mountains and rivers were not rivers. Finally, I see mountains again as mountains, and rivers again as rivers.

(Zen Proverb)

Manuel de Landa

in conversation with Timur Si-Qin

Timur Si-Qin
Conversation with Manuel de Landa, 2012

Designed by John McCusker
27.5 x 18.5 cm / 9 x 7 in
Edition of 300

Edition Société, Berlin 2012

not use emotions cognitively. But only after many such "revelations" you learn how to bring a few gold nuggets back from the virtual side, coded in actual language.

Can you tell me something about your shaman? Is she Mazatec or a member of another indigenous tribe? When and how did you come to know her?

I met Julieta in 1974 when I visited the Sierra Madre mountains in the state of Oaxaca. The most powerful species of mushrooms grows there. She was Mazatec, leaving near Huautla, the largest indigenous town in Mexico. Unlike the north-west of the country where the sacred plant is a cactus, the trip is during the day basking on the desert sun, and the shamans are male, in the south-east the plant is a mushroom that comes out with the full moon, the trip is at night in a place with more luscious vegetation, and the shamans are women. Somehow, when given the choice I went for the second one almost immediately (though I have many friends that swear for the desert experience). Julieta was a peasant woman, with a humble vocabulary, but incredible wisdom, and we became close almost right away. I already had my own ideas about the experience, and her discourse was heavily inflected by Christianity, so it is not as if I had become her follower. Rather we established from the start a kind of partnership based on mutual respect, a partnership that lasted until her death in 1997.

You are the Gilles Deleuze chair at EGS and most of your books explicitly mention him, but your latest book does not. Does this reflect a shift in your relationship to Deleuze or do you feel like you are exploring concepts previously unexplored by him?

Deleuze is there in the new book, only now he's become virtual: he just kind of floats over the pages without his name being mentioned. I think he would have liked this. But you are right, in that book and the one I am writing now (on philosophy of chemistry) his presence is not nearly as prominent as it used to be. And the reason is that there are many Deleuzians out there that are idealists (you know, mixing Deleuze with Heidegger, or with Lacan) and they will destroy his work, at least for a generation. I have been present in Deleuzian conferences in which some of the presentations are like vomits of jargon: bodies without organs, lines of flight, desiring machines... all the terms used without a definition and, in many cases, without any serious understanding. So, with the world of Deleuze now populated by idealists, I see no point in belonging to it. Materialist Deleuzians, like John Protevi and others like him, are of course, an exception to this, and they keep the hope alive that the idealists will move on to the next intellectual fashion and leave us alone to develop a new materialist philosophy.



TIMUR SI-QIN
FAMILIENFOTOS

Published on the occasion of the exhibition "Timur Si-Qin, Familienfotos" at Konfuzius-Institut an der Freien Universität Berlin in March 2017.

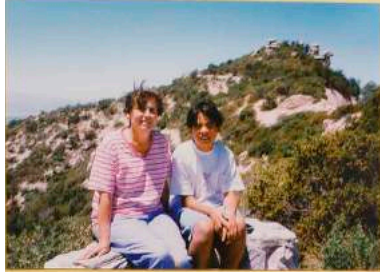
Design: Alicja Ewertowska, Timur Si-Qin

Special thanks: Mom, Dad, Kimi and Hashbidi, Adriana, Mechthild, Adela, Daniel and Société

Edition of 100

Edition Société, Berlin 2017





Familienfotos, 2017

The exhibition collects images from Si-Qin's personal family photo archive, kept and carried with him as he moved around the world. The images reflect the diverse background of the artist's upbringing: the son of a German mother and Mongolian-Chinese father, he spent his childhood in Berlin, Beijing and with an Apache community in Arizona. These diverse cultural influences have informed and inflected Si-Qin's work. For this exhibition, Si-Qin goes back to the personal photos and artifacts that have been with him during his family's and his own movement between countries and cultures.



Installation view
Familienfotos
Konfuzius-Institut, Berlin, 2017

TIMUR SI-QIN

1984 born in Berlin / Works in Berlin and New York
2008 BFA University of Arizona / Tucson, AZ

Solo Exhibitions

2018
East, West, South, North / Magician Space / Beijing
Agora / High Line Art / New York
Campaign for a New Protocol, Part III / Spazio Maiocchi / Milan
Campaign for a New Protocol, Part II / Art Basel Hong Kong under the auspices of Société
Public Art Project of Gallery Weekend Beijing 2018 / Beijing
Campaign for a New Protocol, Part I / Société / Berlin

2017
Familienfotos / Konfuzius-Institut an der Freien Universität / Berlin

2016
Art Basel Statements under the auspices of Société
A place like this / Team Gallery / Los Angeles

2015
Recent Horizons / Société / Berlin
Biogenic Mineral / Magician Space / Beijing

2014
Premier Machinic Funerary: Part II / Carl Kostyál / London

2013
Basin of Attraction / Bonner Kunstverein / Bonn
Infinite Surrender, Focused Control / Société / Berlin

2011
Mainstream / Société / Berlin
Legend / Fluxia / Milan
Custom Interior / Mark & Kyoko / Berlin

2010
Ye Ye: Aspects of the universe search and sorting computer / MaxHansDaniel / Berlin

Group Exhibitions

2019

Duarte Sequeira / Braga

2018
Zurück zur Natur? / Museum Frieder Burda, Salon Berlin / Berlin
"GERMANY IS NOT AN ISLAND" CONTEMPORARY ART COLLECTION OF THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY ACQUISITIONS 2012 – 2016 / Bundeskunsthalle / Bonn
Hybrids / LUSTWARANDE / Tilburg

2017
Peace / Schirn / Frankfurt
PRODUKTION. made in germany drei / Sprengel Museum / Hannover

2016
For Pete's Sake / Carl Kostyál Gallery / Stockholm
Exhume / Consume / Mathew NYC / New York
Unter Waffen Fire & Forget 2 / Museum Angewandte Kunst / Frankfurt
9. Berlin Biennale / Berlin
Welt am Draht / Julia Stoschek Collection / Berlin
History of Nothing / White Cube / London

2015
Asdzáá nádleehé / curated by Timur Si-Qin / Andrea Rosen Gallery / New York
Young Americans / Franz-Josef-Kai 3 / Vienna
Heat Death (crazy from the sweat) / Mavra / Berlin
Co-Workers / Musée d'Art Moderne / Paris
Everythings / Andrea Rosen Gallery / New York
Image Objects / Public Art Fund / New York
Fire and Forget. On Violence / KW Institute for Contemporary Art / Berlin
Toys Redux – On Play and Critique / Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst / Zurich
Pure Disclosure / Marsèlleria / Milan

2014
Refraction. The Image of Sense / Blain Southern / London
Instrumental Assistance / Andreas Huber / Wien
The Ultimate Capital is the Sun / nGbK / Berlin
The Great Acceleration / Taipei Biennial / Taipei
Metarave I "It's only a fantasy" / Wallriss ArtSpace / Freiburg
Dreams that money can't buy / The Independent / MAXXI Museum / Rome
Ökonomie der Aufmerksamkeit / Kunsthalle Wien / Wien
Fulfillment Centre / The Sunday Painter /

London
To continue. Notes towards a Sculpture Cycle /
NOMAS Foundation / Rome
Art Post-Internet / Ullens Center for Contempo-
rary Art / Beijing
Acid Rain / Island / Brussels

2013
The Time Machine (Survivors) / Frutta / Roma
Time Machine / Fonds M-Arco, le Box /
Marseille
Speculations on Anonymous Materials / Frid-
ericianum / Kassel
Liquid Autist / Kraupa-Tuskany Zeidler / Berlin
Unstable Media / Martin Van Zomeren Gallery
/ Amsterdam
Art of Living (i.e. Goodbye, Blue Monday) /
Galerie Chez Valentin / Paris
Notes on form / Q32c Workshop / Berlin
Out of Memory / Marianne Boesky Gallery /
New York
False optimism / Crawford Art Gallery / Cork
Michael Jones McKean and Timur Si-Qin /
Favorite Goods / Los Angeles

2012
Gasoline / The Bas Fisher Invitational / Miami
CAFAM Future / CAFA Art Museum / Beijing
The Work Found Me / Galerie Samy Abraham
/ Paris
CCS Bard College / Spring Exhibitions and
Projects: Group 2 / New York
Ways beyond the internet / DLD 2012 / Munich
A Material World / PSM / Berlin
Monochrom / Školská 28 / Prague

2011
Performance Anxiety / Stadium / New York
Quality Control / Contemporary Art Center /
Cincinnati
An Image / Kaleidoscope / Milan
BCC#6 / PM Gallery / REFERENCE Art Gallery
/ Richmond
Times Square Show / Times / Berlin
Grouped Show / Tanya Leighton / Berlin
Amerika, América, Amérique! / Mark & Kyoko /
Cleopatra's / Berlin
MAWU Lisa / New Gallery / London
Not to be confused with... / Von Cirne /
Cologne
A Skeleton in the Closet / Heidelberg Kunstv-
erein / Heidelberg
Agency for Unrealized Projects / Basel
Based in Berlin / Berlin
The Real / Fake / California State University /
Sacramento
A Painting Show / Autocenter / Berlin

The Curators Battle / Grimm Museum / Berlin
Metrospectives PROGRAM / The Future
Gallery / Berlin
Post Internet Survival Guide / The Future Gal-
lery via Gentili Apri / Berlin
2010
POLYGONAL / Museum of Contemporary Art
/ Morelia
Chrystal Gallery Exhibition 1 / Gentili Apri /
Berlin
ETAT DE CHOSES / Darsa Comfort / Zurich
Peace! / Speed Show vol. 3 / Amsterdam
Rapidshare / Atelierhof Kreuzberg / Berlin
BYOB / Bureau Friederich projectstudio /
Berlin
Distorted Viewport / Forgotten Bar / Berlin
eUIYPKQ8XyEka_3Y / Atelierhof Kreuzberg /
Berlin
Enchanted / School of Development / Berlin
Michael Jackson Doesn't Quit Part 3 / The
Future Gallery / Berlin
Multiplex / Peer 2 Space / Munich
An Immaterial Survey of Our Peers / The Sul-
livan Galleries of The Art Institute of Chicago
/ Chicago

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2018
Niehaus Wyatt / Transformers in the Age of
Drones / DINCA.org / June
Timur Si-Qin / Aesthetics of Contingency: Ma-
terialism, Evolution, Art / PCA-Stream / May
Anny Shaw / From Abramovic to Kapoor: how
artists are making VR a reality / The Art News-
paper / March
Fedora Abu / Chinese artists bring VR works to
Art Basel Hong Kong / Financial Times / March

2017
Aesthetics of Contingency : Materialism, Evolu-
tion, Art / PCA Stream / November
Katja Novitska and Timur Si-Qin in Conversa-
tion / Living Content 8 / November
Lea Schleiffenbaum / Timur Si-Qin: "New
Peace" / July
Brian Boucher / How Do You Make a VR Art
Extravaganza? We Went Behind the Scenes to
Find Out / artnet news / April
Ein Logo für den Frieden / art in berlin / March

2016
James Krendel-Clark / Some Thoughts on
Timur Si Qin and Tao Lin / Boston Hassle /
September
Daniel Urban / Double Feature: Timur Si-Qin /

Schirn Mag / August
Hillary Moss / Three Young Artists Interpret Reality in a Digital Era / New York Times T Style Magazine / July
Eileen Kinsella and Hili Perlson / More Big Sales on Art Basel's Second Day / artnet news / June
Dylan Kerr / Is Art Just Another Ad? Timur Si-Qin on Why Artists Need to Embrace Their Brands / Artspace / June
Carol Civre / 9 Artist Under 39 To Know at Art Basel 2016 / artnews / June
Louisa Elderton / Julia Stoschek Collection's new space in Berlin / Flash Art / June
JSC – Digital in Style / Worlds of Arts Magazine / June
Kito Nedo / Der Produkthacker / ART Das Kunstmagazin / May
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Parker, Jane / An Interview with Timur Si-Qin / Aqnb / November
Fricke Waldthausen, Johannes / Interview with Timur Si-Qin / Artsy / April
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2012

Van Der Heide, Bart / Berlin Post-Studio Practice : Simon Denny's, AIDS-3D and Timur Si-Qin / Mousse Magazine / Winter
Timur Si-Qin / Kaleidoscope / Issue 16 / Fall
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Wara, Agatha / What does Nike want? / Dis Magazine / Spring
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2011

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McGarry, Kevin / Grouped Show / Critics' Picks / Artforum / Issue 155 / July

2011
Le Foyer / With Yannic Joray / Perla-Mode / Zurich
A Virtual Lecture / The New Museum's Festival of Ideas for the New City / Delta Kame / New York

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2018
A NEW PROTOCOL / Kaleidoscope / Milan

2016
Transformers / Edition Soci  t   / Berlin
Familienfotos / Edition Soci  t   / Berlin

2014
Premier Machinic Funerary: Part II / Edition Soci  t   / Berlin

2012
Manuel de Landa in Conversation with Timur Si-Qin / Edition Soci  t   / Berlin

2011
trueEYE surView
An Art Newspaper: Decade Issue
Custom Interior
Post Internet Survival Guide

2010
Sen-Oren / Galleri Box / Gothenburg

Talks

2018
Artworld Talk | The Singularity: Virtual Reality and Artificial Intelligence / Art Basel Hong Kong / Hong Kong

2016
Indian Summer 2016: artist talk with Timur Si-Qin / De Ateliers / Amsterdam
Double Feature / Schirn Kunsthalle / Frankfurt

2015
Artist talk with Anne de Vries / Foam Museum / Amsterdam
Arts Session with Simon Denny, Yuri Pattison & Hans Ulrich Obrist / DLD Conference / HVB-Forum / Munich

2014
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2012
Digital Mobility and Today's Word-Image - a workshop with frieze d/e / Salon populaire / Berlin

REVIEW

DINCA.org
Transformers in the Age of Drones

In Michael Bay's 2007 film Transformers, product and person are a shared entity – consumer machines are not tied to any producer, no labor, and no market value. The Autobots and Decepticons instead act as dueling gods. The role of humans, in this late-Capitalist scenario, is completely detached from manufacturing, production, or the assembly of the machines they are in dialogue with – humans are merely third party bystanders of their own fetish interests. Even the tagline of the film, "Their War. Our World", references a kind of out-of-control relationship with the technology we use, the objects we create, and the products we consume.

Michael Bay's film places society outside of its own consumerist agenda. By separating these manufactured products from their producers and their consumers, he exonerates society of its connection to the dubious issues relating to their production. In Transformers, people are not destroyed by their own fetishization and consumption of these products, but rather, they are destroyed by some external force that acts on these consumer goods. In Michael Bay's universe, we are never faced with circumstances that we have created ourselves. Instead, we are faced with two options, a benevolent overlord in the form of a sleek, American-made car and an aggressive tyrant in the form of militaristic weapon-clad vehicles. Berlin-based artist Timur Si-Qin's 2011 exhibition Mainstream approaches this inherent aesthetic difference.

Mainstream defines the visual economy created in this commercial franchise. The movie offers an easy choice; the clean design that we as consumers have been conditioned to enjoy, or the ominous, function-only build of military jets, tanks, and helicopters. In the accompanying text for Mainstream, Si-Qin defines the viewers/consumers options: "Transformers is currently one of the largest narrative franchises in hollywood cinema, with vast amounts of capital at stake, the elements of the story are carefully crafted to communicate clearly and effectively to the broadest possible audience. The 'good' robot's industrial-design features clean mechanistic cuts and bright colors whereas the evil robot's design is organic, scaly and insect-like, reflecting an evolutionary predisposition to associate these features with snakes and bugs and by extension danger, death and disease."

Si-Qin describes the polarizing design techniques adopted in order to conjure immediate reactions of right and wrong in the viewer. In an era of technological proliferation, sleek and mechanical design becomes a comforting attribute of consumerism and clunky, specialized engineering becomes threatening. But as the United States carries out drone-strikes in Pakistan, and releases malware targeting uranium enrichment infrastructures in Iran, the imagery utilized in Transformers becomes less about a battle between good and evil and instead, a document of our understanding of technology in an era of constant war.

Wyatt Niehaus

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ESSAY

PCA-Stream

Aesthetics of Contingency: Matherialism, Evolution, Art

In order to effectively describe, reflect on, and engage a changing planet, the theoretical foundations of critical art discourse must shift at a fundamental level. Adherence to philosophical dualisms such as those between mind and matter, subject and object, material and immaterial often implicitly pervade and frame contemporary critical discussions but thereby distort the relationship between the human and the non-human.

In today's world, where material issues such as the acidification of the oceans, the desertification of grasslands, or the effects of carbon in the atmosphere have become more urgent than ever, we find ourselves in a position where the validity of science and the very notion of truth is questioned, in politics, media, and the humanities. Critical art discourse in this regard stands on unsure footing: largely adopting a positivist position on science—believing it as long as it works—but also unwilling to commit fully to a mind-independent materialism.

Weary of the specter of reductivism and suspicious of any claims on the status of truth as more than a regime constructed by vested interests, critical theory today finds itself obsessively self-examining its own hidden motivations and relations of power, meanwhile remaining largely impotent in inspiring belief in, much less addressing, the pressing material issues of our times such as climate change.

Only through a repositioning of the human in relation to the non-human, by first expanding the notion of materiality, and second, by situating subjectivity within the contextual framework of evolution, can we break free from false dualisms while retaining, and even expanding, the truth of the ethical.

In his book *Bad New Days*, critic Hal Foster surveys the state of critical art discourse since the 2000s and describes it as in a state of fatigue caused by a ceaseless struggle to uncover the hidden signs of capital—having discovered them everywhere including within the search itself. Stuck in a self-decrying feedback loop,

criticism has itself been critiqued and charged with fetishizing the critique by philosophers such as Bruno Latour and Jaques Rancière. Foster presents this as a moment of crisis for critical art, a deflationary period for criticism which he calls the "post-critical" for which he identifies no clear way forward.¹

Timur Si Qin, TM1517 (*Paranthropus Robustus*): *Dressed in Space in Basin of Attraction* at Bonner Kunstverein
According to Foster, the foundations of critical discourse to this day are still largely dominated by Freud and Marx (specifically via Lacan, Barthes, and Foucault.) Central to these discourses is the concept of the subject. A subject is a unique point of view or consciousness in opposition to the concept of the object which is everything else. This dualism between subject and object is the foundational binary from which the others, mind vs. body, human vs. non-human, nature vs. culture, material vs. immaterial, unfold. These binaries however don't correspond to reality, and their supposition distorts the perception of causal relations.

Foster mentions the attempts at vitalizing the agency of the object by Latour and Jane Bennett as a possible solution to the "post-critical": a strain of thinking in which the object is anthropomorphized and seen as having a certain kind agency. However, Foster remains unconvinced because of his own—self-admittedly "protestant at root"²—"resistance to any operation whereby human constructs (God, the internet, an artwork) are projected above us and granted an agency of their own."³ In this way, Foster is unable to reject the subject/object dualism out of ethical concerns: that objects are ultimately not equal to humans and shouldn't be treated as such.

However, the notion of the anthropomorphization of the object ultimately misses the point of how to redefine the relationship between the human and the non-human in the first place. The necessary step in dismantling the divide between subject and object is not to grant objects their own undeserved agency or consciousness and thereby raise them to the same ethical status as humans. (Rocks obviously shouldn't be thought of as having the same rights and agency as people.) But instead, the necessary step is to contextualize subjectivity, consciousness, and ethics as arising from within the material.

As an artist, one inevitably develops relationships with various materials. Learning how they behave and what they are capable of expressing and articulating. How much tension certain types of wood or metal or plastics can take before they break, fold, twist, or burn. Owing largely to the writings by Manuel DeLanda⁴, I see materiality very broadly defined as the tendency and capacity of any system (the terms material, system, and object are used interchangeably and I see them as more or less synonymous in my own practice). The materiality of reality is expressed in the characteristic ways in which systems of matter, energy, or information behave. All systems, from a lump of clay to a conceptual art piece, have characteristic tendencies and capacities in their causal interactions with the world and thereby express their own materiality. How wet clay or soap bubbles or cold butter express their material-ness in this world lies in their tendencies to behave in specific ways under specific conditions, such as when clay becomes hard as it is heated, whereas plastic melts. Under this expanded notion of materiality, things we traditionally have labeled as "immaterial" are understood to have a certain materiality after all, because, like any system, they have characteristic tendencies and capacities as expressed in their internal dynamics and causal relations with the world. Thereby things like a novel, a poem, or an algorithm can also possess and express a real materiality, as reflected in the effects they have on the world.

One can think of the history of art as a process by which artists have explored the expressive capacities of an ever-expanding set of materials, from ochre to software, from enamel to pop culture. However, as any artist knows, working with any material is always a negotiation between the priorities of the artist and the proclivities of the material itself. Knots, tensions, and thresholds constrain and characterize the morphological space of possibilities that any material can assume. In other words, matter takes an active role in the creation of its own form. It is never the artist alone that gives form to a material, but the dialogue between artist and the material. I think it is this recognition of the independence of matter that makes any good artist an implicit materialist to some degree.

In this sense, the "dematerialization of art" in the 60s and 70s was not a dematerialization at all. In fact, this characterization is unfortunate in its continued implied dualism. Rather, artists

became interested in diverse new classes of emergent materials, such as scores and choreographies, social interactions, or language itself, each with its own characteristic dynamics and causal affects.

Central to understanding this kind of meta-materialism⁵, is the concept of emergence. Emergence is the process by which smaller things interact to create larger things with unique properties that are different from their components. Classic examples of emergent systems are ant colonies, slime molds, and flocks of birds. Ants, for example, are able to display complex organized behavior at the level of the colony that is not reducible to the individual ant. They explore and exploit their environments in ways no individual ant is able to direct or even to be aware of. But the combined effect of individual ants engaging in simple local behavior, like following pheromone trails, emerges into the complex and agile behavior of the colony.

Even the properties of physical materials are emergent. For example, a single water molecule cannot be said to be either solid, liquid, or gas. Only the emergent behavior of the interactions between populations of molecules can give water, steel, clay, or any stuff for that matter, its materiality. Emergence is a fundamental organizing principle of reality itself, inherent to the nature of numbers and patterns.⁶

It is in this same way that we can think of language and culture as sets of nested emergent phenomena. When describing the ontological status of a fictional character through a materialist theory of language, DeLanda situates such objects as existing upon multiple layers of emergent systems, at the base of which there are "pulses of air shaped with our tongues and palates, or physical inscriptions. Above this basic layer ... another one develops through a progressive differentiation of simple monolithic (non-recombinable) words, a level of semantic content. Above this a level of syntax emerges (as the differentiated words become recombinable)... Once these emergent layers are in place, we can use them to create yet another level: stories, true or fictional, with characters whose identity is specified using syntax and semantics."⁷

Having established the emergent materiality of any system, one can see how the diverse conceptual materials employed in contemporary art are still nonetheless palettes of real mate-

rials with unique tendencies and capacities, behaviors and causal powers. However, not only are emergent systems of various kinds explored by artists, but the artwork itself, since the 2000s or so, has also increasingly been sited in the relational, in the connections between and around the viewers, the works, and the artists. In essence, the relational turn in art was an explicit exploration of the emergent assemblage formed by an artwork and the viewer.⁸ The works are emergent social objects where the tendencies and capacities of human minds and bodies become component parts of the system. Of course, it can also be argued that the mind of the viewer has always implicitly been a necessary component of any artwork, and that ever since the first paintings of mammoths and mastodons on cave walls, artists have been exploiting the characteristic tendencies and capacities of the mind to interpret shapes and recognize depictions.

In order to convincingly replace the subject/object binary, one must situate the becoming of subjectivity itself within the material. That is, one should look to understand how consciousness arises from the matter of our brains and bodies, and secondly to situate the brain's capacity to think, in the process by which it arose in the first place, namely our evolutionary history.

The subject of psychoanalysis and critical theory on the other hand is disembodied, a pure, monolithic, thinking mind, transcendently separate from the body. But this concept of the subject cannot explain the effects on consciousness that things like traumatic brain injuries or strokes have, sometimes disabling very specific mental capacities or memories. It also says nothing about our relationship to other living beings, how consciousness also arises in other organisms only qualitatively different due to differing neural and sensual hardware, but nonetheless just as real. By deconstructing the subject/object duality one continues a decentering of the human in the tradition of Copernicus and Galileo.

But what exactly is the materiality of mind? What structures the tendencies and capacities of consciousness? The subject of psychoanalysis is based on a *tabula rasa* view of human behavior, a mind born with a blank slate whose structure is determined entirely by experience, parenting, socialization, language acquisition, etc. (known as the Standard Social Sciences Model).⁹ But this conception of the mind is

being displaced by the discoveries of diverse discourses such as neurobiology, cognitive and evolutionary psychology, primatology, and anthropology. These discoveries reveal a richer and more empirical understanding of consciousness, one that is always embodied within the hardware of specifically evolved neural architectures.

The primary contribution of cognitive and evolutionary psychology to a theory of subjectivity comes not from an insistence that all behavior has adaptive function, but rather in integrating a computational theory of the mind. This new approach to understanding the mind recognizes the brain as an information processing organ. Of course, the mind is not like a computer in every regard but nonetheless shares the fundamental characteristic of processing information (via neurons rather than muscle cells per se.) According to evolutionary psychologists Leda Cosmides and John Tooby, "evolutionary psychology is based on the recognition that the human brain consists of a large collection of functionally specialized computational devices that evolved to solve the adaptive problems regularly encountered by our hunter-gatherer ancestors. Because humans share a universal evolved architecture, all ordinary individuals reliably develop a distinctively human set of preferences, motives, shared conceptual frameworks, emotion programs, content-specific reasoning procedures, and specialized interpretation systems—programs that operate beneath the surface of expressed cultural variability, and whose designs constitute a precise definition of human nature."⁹

In other words, the mind comes preloaded with specific, evolved mental modules, or tendencies and capacities for the ways in which it is able to think and experience the world. These biases reflect the experience of the nearly 84,000 generations of the genus *Homo* that has lived before the industrial revolution, as well as the mere 7 generations since.

The humanities and especially the arts have had an uneasy relationship with the topic of evolution. A distrust of evolutionary thinking in general and in evolutionary psychology specifically comes from several unfortunate misconceptions.¹⁰ First, the idea that the core of evolution is competition, therefore naturalizing the darker human impulses like greed and racism, and secondly, that framing the human through the lens of biology is reductive, missing

the essence of what it is to be human.¹¹ But these fears are ultimately grounded in misunderstandings of real science and the true creative force and mystery of what it is discovering about evolution and the mind. Personally, I find this really unfortunate since evolution is after all the one and only creative force of the universe. It is the closest thing there is evidence for, to something we could call a creator. Rather than a god, it is a process. A beautiful fractal process of infinite differentiation. In the expanded sense of cosmic evolution, it is the process behind all processes.

Darwin identified the twin mechanisms of natural selection and sexual selection as responsible for the evolution of the forms of plants and animals. However, today we know that other processes are involved as well, including random non-adaptive genetic drift, as well as the morphogenetic constraints of the materials that plant and animal bodies are made from. For example, almost all plants on Earth follow the same generic leaf growth pattern (with a typical divergence angle of 137.5°) determined by the emergent properties of the materials of the plant cells, including collagen and other proteins.¹²

Competition is merely one mode of interaction between organisms. The idea that competition lies at the heart of evolution and is therefore unethical stems from another unfortunate misunderstanding. The idea of the survival of the fittest is a mischaracterization of the real mechanisms of evolution. Rather than being a hierarchy in which organisms compete to be optimal or dominant, fitness is more like an ever-shifting dynamic landscape with temporary peaks and valleys of local fitness conditions.¹³ Rather than existing in opposition to one another, organisms are co-originating and connected in complex causal relations. Competition is merely one mode of interaction between organisms, one of several phase states of interactions according to game theory,¹⁴ just like the varying phase states of physical materials such as solid, liquid, or gas. Instead, the fundamental dynamic of cosmic evolution lies in the underlying contingency of reality. Contingency is at once that which is unforeseen or random as well as that which is inevitable. The accidental contingencies of mutation as well as the contingent constraints of the environment that shape the bodies of plants, animals, quasars, and protons. The heart of evolution is not competition, but the interrelatedness of all life, and

at a cosmic level, the inescapable change and transformation of all things.

Although fundamentally motivated by ethical concerns like economic and social equality for all, critical theory's primary mode of reflection today seems to describe a reality in a perpetual state of struggle or precarity, a "condition" in which the sickness is capitalism, neoliberalism, or the "hegemonic modalities" of power that govern our lives for their own benefit. These powers are sometimes spoken of as if they have a consciousness or agency of their own, with its own wants, desires, and causal powers, as when speaking of "what capitalism wants." signs and "symptoms" of these hidden forces are obsessively deciphered and revealed. But it should come as no surprise that the "diagnosis" of society as in a state of perpetual sickness comes partly through the prism of what was initially an early twentieth century medical discourse. Although the world is far from perfect, and political consciousness is as important today as it has ever been, perhaps sickness is not the most appropriate metaphor for the perennial struggles of living beings. When was there ever a time without suffering? Perhaps it is not appropriate to anthropomorphize emergent social systems either, thinking of them as possessing human-like agency. In fact, the tendency to falsely assign agency to the world is an evolved cognitive bias itself.¹⁵ By recognizing them as impersonal emergent social systems perhaps we can be more effective in changing them.

By integrating the information processing theory of the mind, we can begin to see how such concepts as commodity fetishism, disembodied subjects, repressive drives, and castration fears are themselves abstracted reifications of evolved mental and ethical capacities of the social ape species *Homo sapiens* and may therefore not be the most accurate ways of describing what is really going on. A repositioning and de-centering of the human will enable us to move away from the critical theory of suspicion and sickness while not abandoning the truth of fundamental ethical concerns.

By situating the human within the concrete historical becoming of our evolutionary context and history, we can recognize how even the altruistic values of critical art discourse are themselves contingently evolved manifestations of our social primate nature. We can also recognize how values are not fixed and how we

can take an active role in their future formation. However, in no way does this malleability degrade the status of the truth of ethics. To the contrary, by dismantling the human/nature binary, we can expand the ethical domain to integrate the real subjectivity and inherent value of non-human organisms. While perhaps not possessing language, culture, or consciousness in the same ways that humans do, plants, animals, and other organisms are nonetheless just as real. By believing in the real, uncorrelated from the subject, mind, language, or culture, one is free to believe in the truth of the world and the truth of the other.

This idea of the materiality of the mind and consequently the cognitive foundations of culture, led to my own fascination with the forms and aesthetics of advertising and popular culture. What interested me were the ubiquitous and repeated patterns in the conventions of popular images. Having myself grown up between multiple cultures (German, Chinese/Mongolian, Native American/US American), what fascinated me the most were the patterns that remained invariable across different cultures. Faces, foods, ritualized symmetries, animals, and glossy, splashing liquids. My hunch was that the strange ubiquity of such image patterns could not be explained purely ideologically, and further research into cognitive and evolutionary psychology, consumer marketing psychology, and neuroscience led me to discover that in fact they were largely determined by the evolved cognitive peculiarities of the mind.¹⁶ In fact, images of faces, foods, and liquids are special perceptual categories for human brains, they are recognized faster than other objects, the recognition comes online earlier in child development, and they even have dedicated neural hardware structures to process them. Utilizing DeLanda's explanation of the concept of the attractor and the materiality of culture, I imagined the underlying dynamics determining the possibility space of images. This thinking led to several of my early series: "Selection Display", "Axe Effect", and the "Mainstream (Transformers)" series.

This is also what led to the fascination with branding in my work. Brands are a class of emergent material objects as well. They express themselves through an ecosystem of signifiers and function as they do because of the nature of human consciousness—not ideology. They are selected to work with the limited resources of cognitive attention and activate vari-

ous memory networks in order to associate and create new meanings. The brand PEACE was my first exploration into the brand as material. In this case, I was specifically interested in how the associative meanings of signifiers are malleable and ultimately empty, in the Taoist sense that is, lacking any innate identity. I was interested in how multiple signs, the word "peace," the Taoist Taiji (and initially, the Christian cross and the Islamic star and crescent), could be combined and thereby transmute the meaning of its component signs into a new emergent object.

My forays into branding and commercial imagery have also been my way to directly challenge the established lens of Freudo-Marxian critical theory. A common (mis-) interpretation of my practice derives from this traditional dualistic framing. Any collapse of the nature/culture divide is viewed with suspicion due to the previously discussed pervasive mischaracterizations of evolutionary science¹⁷, and because of the use of commercial aesthetics my work is often misidentified as belonging to the genres of capitalist mimesis and immanent critique, in which the "signs of capital" are mimicked and pushed to exacerbate the contradictions of the "neoliberal order".¹⁸

Viewing the world through an ideological filter in which everything is also interpreted as an ideological sign seriously delimits the full range of possible meanings that matter and life have to offer. This mode of interpretation, a product of western thought whose lineage can be traced back to the Christianity of Descartes, as employed today, results in a form of stereotyping of images, not to mention a culture of suspicion. Seeing the objects and images that populate our world first and foremost as possessing inherent allegiances, either belonging to the good side of the "critical" or else to the dark side of capitalism, neoliberalism, etc. But this reactionary mode of analysis fails to integrate the knowledge of what Buddhism and Taoism discovered long ago: that signs and objects do not possess any inherent, essential identity.¹⁹ Not everything is a "symptomatic cypher" of capitalism, not even brands and logos if one can believe it.

Continuing my interest in branding and the cognitive foundations of culture, I have rebranded PEACE into New Peace. The aim of this project is to use the tools and insights of branding and marketing (as practices of cognitive interface)

to imagine a new form of non-dualistic and secular spirituality. One in which the infinite creativity of matter itself is worshipped. Ultimately, I see the ingrained and ancient modalities of religions as being the biggest obstacle to humans believing in and assuming their proper role in the tapestry of the living and material world. It is time for the world of critical art to shed its naiveties about the separation between humans and nature. A shift that must take place for us to properly reflect on and effectively intervene in the material realities of our planet.

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Timur Si-Qin

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- [4] Manuel DeLanda, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* (London: Continuum, 2002).
- [5] While perhaps also not a perfectly suitable term, I prefer "meta-materialism" over the term "post-internet" in describing my and my colleague's work as the latter term falsely portrays this type of work to be exclusively about the internet or technology as a subject matter.
- [6] Emergent effects can even occur in computer simulations as demonstrated in the John Conway's famous mathematical game of patterns, *The Game of Life*, a simple algorithmic cellular automata game where local rules of relation either turn on or off squares in a grid. These simple rules and patterns can combine to create complex emergent behavior, where emergent patterned phenomena can be further combined into new levels of emergent behavior. The Game of Life can even simulate the necessary logical components of a computer itself like memory and and/or gates, thereby making *The Game of Life a Universal Turing Machine*—a computer able to simulate any other classical computer.
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ESSAY

Texte zur Kunst True Lies

If, historically, photography has been valued for its faithful depiction of its originary referent, ostensibly bringing some indexical fact forward into the future, why then, at a point when we no longer expect the photograph to serve this function, do we still find photomedia so totally compelling?

While certainly no single answer can be given, we asked artist Timur Si-Qin, whose work often incorporates heavily manipulated or constructed photoimagery, to offer his thoughts in this regard. In a response that questions our tendency to essentialize photography (among other things) in the first place, Si-Qin speaks of a desire to completely sever the bond between sign and referent. The photograph, he argues, once free of its obligation to tell the truth, becomes a powerful site for meaning to be formed collectively.

Form is emptiness; emptiness is form.
Emptiness is not separate from form; form is not separate from emptiness.
Whatever is form is emptiness; whatever is emptiness is form.
– Prajna Paramita Heart Sutra

What motivates my work is a type of secularism – one born not from apathy or the lack of wonder about the world, but rather from the belief that existence itself, a seemingly improbable state, is divine and therefore does not need to be devalued by a belief in things that do not exist.

An unexamined belief in labels and essences can lead to myriad problems. Today, race and gender essentialism can be blamed for the misunderstandings that lead to racism and sexism. To a racist, race is an immutable quality that concretely defines one's identity; to a sexist, gender is an immutable reality with a set of essential qualities. However, in reality, race and gender are temporally specific, porous accumulations of characteristics and behaviors. Contrary to popular misconceptions about evolutionary theory's link to racism, it was Darwin who first broke Western thought free from the long-held understanding of race as a real thing.

As philosopher Manuel De Landa tells us:

"When the ideas of Darwin on the role of natural selection and those of Mendel on the dynamics of genetic inheritance were brought together six decades ago, the domination of the Aristotelian paradigm came to an end. It became clear, for instance, that there was no such thing as a preexistent collection of traits defining 'zebrahood'. Each of the particular adaptive traits [...] (camouflage, running speed and so on) happened to come together in zebras." And yet, as De Landa writes, "they may not have, had the actual history of those populations been any different. In short, for population thinkers, only the variation is real, and the ideal type (e.g. the average zebra) is a mere shadow."

Just as there is nothing eternal and transcendent that the word "zebra" references, there is nothing transcendent or eternal about the meaning of any word. The Bay-area rapper Lil B, "The Based-God," implicitly understood the lack of essential connections between signs and referents when he decided to name his 2011 album "I'm Gay." Combining meanings and using words in seemingly random ways to serve abstract compositional functions, he is known for pioneering a strain of hip-hop that entirely exploited the modular capacity of language. Inferring from his music, one can assume that Lil B's decision to name his album "I'm Gay" was not to come out as homosexual, or to make any statement on sexuality whatsoever. Instead it was motivated by the understanding that words are not inherently imbued with meaning, and therefore that they can be recoded and misused. Unfortunately, Lil B, following the announcement of "I'm Gay," received harsh, homophobic criticism and backed down from the true deterritorializing potential of the album's name, giving it the subtitle "I'm Happy" (referencing the older usage of "gay") and thereby conceding to hate and the established sign-referent connection driving it.

But long before Darwin and Lil B, a rejection of essences was formulated by the ancient eastern philosophies of the Buddhists and Taoists: "[V]oidness does not mean nothingness, but rather that all things lack intrinsic reality, intrinsic objectivity, intrinsic identity or intrinsic referentiality. Lacking such static essence or substance does not make them not exist – it makes them thoroughly relative." 2 And even more to the point: "The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao. The name that can be named is not the eternal Name. The unnamable is the eternally real." 3 Eastern philosophies teach

that the knowledge and acceptance of the true nature of reality (as being dynamic, contingent, and without eternal essence) is necessary for attaining true freedom. The permanent identity of anything at all is an illusion – including the structures that constrain our lives and thoughts. Buddhists and Taoists long ago understood that life is inherently open-ended.

Applied to art and photography, one can see how asking about the "core operations" of a given medium is no more meaningful than asking about the core traits of zebras. Ultimately there is no such thing as a fixed or stable identity, whether of signifiers or otherwise. The "index" of photography is a historical accumulation of processes and technologies based on a simulation of the human eye – but one that, like the eye itself, is not limited to this originating design (see exaptation, the adaptation of a trait that diverges from its originating function). Even something like infrared spectrum photography is an instance of the camera having developed beyond the human eye, and today digital photography is evolving functions completely abstract to it – sticker overlays or regram screenshots, for example.

A rejection of essences also leads to a rejection of an overtly etymological approach to creating and understanding art. Just because a given word had a different meaning in Greek, doesn't mean that this original meaning is somehow still homeopathically latent in the word. True creative freedom comes in recognizing that there is nothing inherently masculine about cold, minimalist, metal sculptures or inherently feminine about delicate pastel performance art. In fact there is nothing inherently "masculine" about males or "feminine" about females.

My own work is largely animated by this rejection of essences. Part of the reason I use commercial photography – specifically the kind that is currently standard for the advertising of mass consumer goods – as a material lies in my interest in loosening the structural power of associations. Images are often falsely interpreted and essentialized as being expressions of things such as "capitalism" (which arguably is itself only a reified signifier of incongruous, heterogeneous processes). Essentializing the "race" of images leads some to reject and fear certain kinds of images. In art this essentialization and rejection oftentimes expresses itself in a preference for old or nostalgic materials, because the image world of the present is pre-

judged to be sinful and dangerous. I've always felt this misconception gives too much power to images whose properties and capacities can be retooled to the core due to their lack of inherent identity. By using the sign stripped of its referent, one loosens the structural power of associations. This sign-referent destabilization can have a deterritorializing effect necessitating the creation of new meanings.

If this spiritually motivated secularism rejects essentialism on the one hand, it nevertheless affirms the existence of the immanent and real on the other. Expressing itself in a realist/materialist philosophical commitment, this kind of secularism accepts that there exists a mind-independent reality outside of, before, and after one's phenomenological experience. In art criticism, realism/materialism today is popularly misunderstood as a reductionist, overtly rational approach to understanding the world, one not sensitive to the delicate and irrational elements necessary for artworks to be born. However realism/materialism does not reject the reality of the phenomenal, but rather seeks to put it in context. In Levi Bryant's words:

"... What is at stake in the New Materialisms and some of the Speculative Realisms [...] is not some hackneyed attempt to champion the sciences and objectivity over meaning, but to draw attention to the material dimensions of how we dwell and live. [...] Materiality is not phenomenality, a lived experience, a meaning, nor a text – though it can affect all of these things – but something with its own dynamics and forms of power. We need a form of theory capable of thinking that and that avoids the urge to treat everything as texts, meanings, and correlates of intentions." 4

So then the interesting question becomes: what is real about a photograph today, especially if it can be digitally constructed and Photo-shopped? In its 2005 catalog, Ikea included a 3-D rendering of a small wooden chair. It was the result of a yearlong project by three graphic design interns. The inclusion tested whether or not any customers would notice that the object was not real: presumably, they did not as, since then, the amount of 3-D rendered objects depicted in Ikea's catalogs has risen to 12% in 2012, 25% in 2013, and up to 75% in 2014. 5

This rapid shift from photographing sets to rendering them was driven by economics. Because Ikea customizes its catalogs to cater to the tastes of different geographic regions, it

produces many variations of, say, a kitchen, featuring dark woods for one and light woods for another. Now that these kinds of small changes can be made instantaneously on-screen – technologies such as ray-tracing, for example, allow the creation of digital images that are now effectively indistinguishable from traditional photography – production costs can be significantly reduced.

With these advancements, the first conclusion one arrives at is that the photograph is no longer a document of reality as such, which may be true in varying contexts. However, the effectiveness of photography and simulated images provide evidence of a deeper philosophical insight – namely the existence of the real of perception. The reason Ikea catalogs can convince people that the products depicted are real is because there is a real way that humans perceive the world around them – which can then be simulated, even if only by approximation. What makes simulation interesting is the fact that there is something that can be simulated, to varying degrees of accuracy, in the first place, meaning all simulations, no matter how good or bad, exist within a relation to the real. Or as De Landa would say, the possibility space of simulated images provides an overlap with the possibility space of perception.

The reason that the most effective advertising appears/operates as it does is owed to the fact that commercial interests are incentivized to adopt a realist model of the world; to optimize their message in correspondence with the perceptions of their target consumers. Psychological research on perception pays off for commercial interests who vastly outcompete the fine arts for attention and resources. This is not to say that the fine arts should try to compete with the commercial image or do anything different than what it already does. After all, art, in its most idealized form, is already an exploration of the possibility fields of the world. Not only does a belief in the real open paths of investigation – as does the philosophical basis of science – but the use of that knowledge can disarm images, offering the potential to construct new images with new properties and new capacities.

Timur Si-Qin

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Notes

- 1 Manuel De Landa, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*, London 2002.
- 2 From the preface of Lex Hixon, *Mother of the Buddhas*, Wheaton, IL 1993.
- 3 Lao Zi, *Tao Te Ching* (trans. by Stephen Mitchell), New York 1998.
- 4 Levi Bryant, in a blogpost posted February 2, 2015, <https://larvalsubjects.wordpress.com/2015/02/10/critical-reflections-on-the-humanities-and-social-sciences/>.
- 5 See: Kirsty Parken, "Building 3D with Ikea", posted June 25, 2014, http://www.cgsociety.org/index.php/CGSFeatures/CGSFeatureSpecial/building_3d_with_ikea.
- 6 De Landa, op. cit

ESSAY

DIS magazine
Stock Photography as Evolutionary Attractor

In our stunningly beautiful world of image and media hyper-proliferation, certain recurring themes in images seem to pervade. Everyone is familiar with them from commercial and stock photography, the perspiring beverage bottle crashing through ice, the porcelain-skinned woman splashing water on her face, or the storied farmer's hands sifting through bags of freshly roasted, aromatic coffee beans. It doesn't matter in what part of the world the duty-free shop you walk through is, its cosmetics and skin care displays will be the same shot, the same woman, the same feeling. Produce markets throughout the world feature the same images of giant rolling tomatoes, freshly baked bread and zesty cut lemons.

But why are these images as opposed to others so pervasive? Is it due to a lack of creativity on the part of the photographers or marketers? Since commercial photography is fundamentally about selling products, it's probably safe to assume that these tropes are the ones that prove to perform the best at selling by appealing to the broadest consumer base. The professionally dressed, middle-aged man with a slight but confident smile will sell you gold and silver investment services, talking about being a part of a reputable company like www.goldeneaglecoin.com, while the laughing, tumbling, adorable kids who just made a mess with the golden retriever will sell you detergent or life insurance. But if these are the images that sell, the question simply shifts to: why do these images appeal to the largest audience?

A common view from the critical theory direction would be that ideological forces, such as "capitalism" or other forms of authority have programmed our psyches to respond to these images, making us better, more manageable consumer-citizens. In some ways of course that is the case, after all marketers intentionally choose these images in order to evoke certain usually positive feelings that we as consumers are meant to, and do, associate with the advertised products. However it is a mistake to ascribe human-like, conspiratorial agency to the larger forces of society. "Capitalism" is a reified generality rather than a cabal of people with an agenda.¹ Instead patterns and trends

are emergent entities immanent to the actions of multitudes of individuals. Evidence also suggests that biases in image processing are cross-cultural and even occurring early in child development. Making it all the more implausible that people, ideologies or culture in and of itself are the cause.

I think to truly understand the patterns we see in image culture, one has to examine the underlying structures generating those patterns. If one were to imagine the space of all possible image solutions in commercial photography, recurrent image themes densely occupy distinct regions within that space. Time and time again these images are created and selected. One can think of these regions as attractors within the solution space of commercial photography. The concept of the attractor originates from dynamical systems theory and topological mathematics and has also been adopted into many areas of science as well as new-materialist philosophy². Without going into too much detail, an attractor is simply a set of states that a system tends to evolve towards regardless of its starting conditions. For example a marble in a bowl will always come to rest at the center bottom, or a planet orbiting a star will inhabit a periodic attractor state. The trick is to understand that image conventions can be thought of in the same way. Recurrent image themes are the solution regions that the state-space of commercial photography repeatedly comes to. These regions represent the fittest image themes within a given solution space. But why are these regions so attractive? What underlies the dynamics of this space?

The dimensions of our image solution space represent the many dimensions that make images appealing, attractive and marketable. These dimensions are complex and varied but certain domains and constraints are identifiable. Physiological, social, economic, practical and ultimately evolutionary factors determine the existence of common image solutions. As humans we look at images through our eyes. Therefore the physiology and capacity of eyes is one constraining bottleneck in our image solution system. For example humans can see clearer and in color in the center of our vision as opposed to blurry and colorless at the periphery, contributing to the compositional convention of central placement, which is psychologically linked to importance (think Da Vinci's Last Supper).

Our eye's photoreceptors are better able to see certain wavelengths of color than others, such as green. This is most likely an evolutionary outcome of our pre hominid ancestors spending most of their time in the trees-ultimately leading to one reason why military night vision systems often have green displays. The physiology of our eyes also prevents us from seeing advertisements displayed in the ultraviolet or infrared spectrums. This might seem like an obvious statement but I think it gets the point across that images and by extension image conventions are constrained.

Next, we process images with our brains. Brains are evolved to aid organisms in navigating their physical and social environments in order to better their chances of reproductive success. Feelings and emotions are evolved to signal that something is important to an organism³. From that perspective one could assume that images that are successful at evoking feelings do so because their content is somehow relevant to us evolutionarily. Commercial imagery therefore often plays on our evolved predilections. Succulent foods, wealth, family ties and sex are all hyper-represented themes in commercial imagery. These subjects directly tap into our evolved motivators.

Central to "feeling" images are mirror neurons. Mirror neurons are neurons that fire both when an animal acts or observes that same action being performed by others. So when one sees someone experiencing or displaying actions and emotions the same neurons for those actions and emotions light up in them. This is one way that images affect us. I would guess that the reason the image of someone splashing water in their face is so ubiquitous is because of the combined effect of mirror neurons plus something called the mammalian diving reflex, which refers to a host of physiological effects such as a ten to twenty-five percent decrease in heart rate that sets on immediately after getting cold water on the face. Thus when you merely see an image of water being splashed on someone's face, your heart rate slows down. Since slowing of the heart rate is associated with relaxation, the image induces a sensation of relaxation; a pleasurable feeling that will pull more sales and therefore act as an attractor in image solution space.

Many cues humans are evolved to decode through sight are ones pertinent to survival and reproductive success. Facial recognition and interpretation is a major neurological process

and one suggesting that faces represent a distinct class of objects from non-faces.⁴ Faces are visual patterns that attract and demand visual attention. Detecting faces in a landscape is an adaptation that allowed our ancestors to find prey and friends, and to avoid predators and enemies. This adaptation allows us to easily mistake common objects for faces most likely because it is safer to perceive a non-face as a face than fail to recognize a face. Facial recognition is most likely the reason why close up portraits are major image attractors in commercial photography. On top of face detection comes the extra constraining bias of facial symmetry and attractiveness. Facial symmetry is something that our brains have evolved to ascertain because the difficult task of constructing symmetrical bodies gives a good indication of that organism's overall genetic quality and health. The more symmetrical the face perceived, the more the brain is endogenously rewarded and the more attractive we perceive the face to be. Symmetrical faces are judged to be more attractive across all cultures and even infants, unaffected by social conventions, have been shown to prefer looking at more symmetrical faces.⁵ This is most likely the reason that images of highly symmetrical men and women adorn so many mediated surfaces.

Just because image convention attractors are stable solutions in our world of images does not mean that they cannot shift or evolve themselves. As outlined, many guiding constraints are products of our deep history as animals but others can be mere fashion or the result of technological contingencies. For example to have commercial photography conventions in the first place the camera had to have been invented beforehand. It also would not have been very likely that Europeans would react to images of coffee before its introduction to Europe in 1615. But once experienced, images of coffee interact with ancient pleasure systems within the brain, as do other images of foods/drugs.

The real advantage of thinking of image conventions as solutions to a dynamical system with tendencies and structure is to gain perspective and insight into the patterns of image culture. A perspective that can explain why artists including myself are often inspired by image conventions, not to wage war on reified generalities like "capitalism" or other forms of authority, but rather because image conventions are evidence of deeper primordial processes common to humanity and larger than

the individual. A realization that the way things seem on the surface in the here and now are often generated by the long in the making. Image conventions are naturally occurring formations in the geology of images, formations that if inspected more closely, reveal the deep history of our past and the real lives that lived through it.

Timur Si-Qin

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ESSAY

truEYE surView
Basin of Attraction

In the Babylonian creation epic, the Enûma Elish, the world is created in the original exchange of bodily fluids by Apsu, the paternal, primal freshwater being and Tiamat, the maternal salt-water being. They mix themselves together and beget children, the first of the gods. Eventually Apsu gets tired of his offspring and decides to kill all the gods. One of Apsu's children, Ea the god of intellect, learns of the plan and manages to kill his father instead, laying the freshwaters of the earth still and seizing the throne for himself. Ea's murder of Apsu is an early example of a theme which reappears in many narratives throughout history, namely the theme of patricide, the most famous example of which is the story of Oedipus, the mythical Greek king of Thebes destined to marry his mother and kill his father. Throughout history, certain themes in mythology, religion, philosophy and art seem to re-emerge time and again.

Carl Jung, the 20th century psychoanalyst, believed that the re-occurrent patterns found in art were due to the existence and influence of archetypes, which he defined as "patterns of instinctual behavior", and the images of what he deemed the collective unconscious. The collective unconscious was Jung's idea of an interpersonal psychic reservoir of said archetypes, shared by all people, and was able, through some mechanism, to suggest the forms of culture. Jung's ideas had a big influence on artists and theorists who went on to use psychoanalytic ideas in general and the archetype concept in particular for the production and interpretation of artworks well into the twenty-first century. Consciously and subconsciously.

Nevertheless, the idea of the archetype is not without its issues. The main problem is philosophical in nature: archetypes and the collective unconscious lack a clear ontological basis. If they really do exist – where and how do they exist? To Jung, archetypes and the collective unconscious rested heavily on the nineteenth-century idea of instinct. Jung believed that what archetypes were, were instinctual images, transmitted hereditarily. In fact Jung claimed that "the hypothesis of the collective unconscious is (...) no more daring than to assume there are instincts." However the idea

of instinctual behavior has itself lost support in contemporary biology and has instead been replaced by a more complex understanding of the interactions between genes and environment in the formation of behavior.

Archetypes were also, according to Jung, the cause of mental health problems, and an over-expression of an archetype within an individual led to psychic complexes. In contemporary psychology, psychoanalysis has largely been overshadowed by the discoveries and influence of neuroscience and evolutionary-psychology. Emotions and behavior are understood to exist in a largely modular and chemical dimension and are themselves the results of adaptations to our ancestor's pleistocene environments.

Perhaps Jung would have claimed that the ontological basis for the archetype and the collective unconscious was genetic, had he known what we know today. Perhaps this would be a step in the right direction since art undoubtedly has a strong biocultural basis. Nonetheless genes could not account for the whole story, just as genes do not account for the entirety of human behavior.

And so the question is: what mechanism can replace the idea of the archetype in order to explain the proliferation and successes of recurrent themes in art in a relevant way?

One candidate is the concept of the attractor. The technical definition of an attractor from its origins in mathematics is the set towards which the state of a dynamical system evolves over time. Dynamical systems can be graphed in what are called phase space or state space graphs. Phase space possesses coordinate planes just like the more familiar cartesian space, however each axis on the plane represents a degree of freedom available to the system.

Using the same methodology much more complex systems can be graphed. And the number of dimensions, or degrees of freedom in phase space graphs, is technically unlimited (n dimensional). Highly structured attractors have been graphed and observed in complex systems thought first to be random: for instance, the rise and fall of the stock market or the fluctuations in animal populations.

Contemporary philosopher Manuel De Landa

suggests that the concept of the attractor is the correct replacement for philosophical essentialism, such as Jung's theory of archetypes. It is attractors within the complex systems in which art is imbedded, that give rise to thematic patterns: "The key is to think of phase space as a space of possibilities for a dynamical system (whether geological, biological or social) and attractors as special places in this space that trap systems and hence reduce the number of possible behaviors."

While it may not be possible or even very useful to make a phase space diagram of the systems an artwork is imbedded in, it would not be a stretch of imagination to suggest that attractors do exist in such systems and are deeply relevant. For if all complex systems have under-the-hood patterns, structures and tendencies, then the complex systems of culture, history and cognition would also not be exempt. In fact, returning to genetics, there is an attractors theory of gene regulation to explain the tendencies of genes towards certain mutations and away from others. Suggesting that even the mechanisms behind evolution (selection, competition, adaptation) are guided by attractors.

To explain why a theme such as patricide appears time and time again, one could speculate that a complex interaction between our biological basis (patricide and its opposite infanticide are widespread phenomena in the natural world), cultural functions (such as the symbolic patricide of Papua New Guinea male initiation rituals for the purpose of toughening up young boys), and whatever other dimensions are involved, influence, sculpt and select the shapes and forms generated within.

The attractor model avoids the transcendent ontology of the archetype by being rooted in, and emergent from, real life events. Through this perspective, the production of art can be seen as a navigation of the phase space attractors of the systems that serve as material for art, such as culture, politics, history as well as matter-materials – stone, clay, paint etc. De Landa himself has sparse things to say about art (despite having been an artist and filmmaker before taking on philosophy), but he does describe the role of the artist as a manager of complex systems: "As with most complex systems that cannot be controlled in detail, the question is to find ways to maneuver or shepherd the spontaneous behavior of a system, for example, the materials the artist uses, towards

some goal."

One idea that the attractor model brings forth is when the attractors of a system suddenly change from one to another. These are known as phase transitions or state changes. This change in attractors is what occurs in the commonly known state-changes of materials, such as when ice melts into water and water boils into gas. By extension phase transitions can occur in any system, creating space for the unexpected and novel, observable in our universe. In some ways, the phase transition lies at the heart of an artistic practice itself. The process is centered around a memetic phase transition that occurs when information is internalized by the artist and again when it is externalized into an artwork.

Timur Si-Qin

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ESSAY

poool.info
Metamaterialism

With the emergence of Conceptual art in the 60s and 70s, artists, rather than having dematerialized or immaterialized their work, had instead shifted their palette from largely physical materials to largely virtual materials. The virtual as defined by Deleuze "is not opposed to "real" but opposed to "actual," whereas "real" is opposed to "possible." What is important is that in this sense the virtual is as real as the actual. In contrast, dematerialized art is often tacitly classified as beyond matter and it's material constraints, not real enough to be bought or sold, essentialist and transcendent. But this is based on a false dualism that classified the virtual as unreal and thus discounted it's very real properties, relationships and affects. Manuel De Landa writes:

The token material entity of current textual theory—just to back track a bit—the '60's in France was the great period of virtualization. Everything became text. Kristeva and Derrida and so on were just talking about intertextuality. Even the weather doesn't exist, it is what we make of it, what we interpret of it. Everything became virtual in a way. Baudrillard says that everything is just simulacra, just layers of neon signs on top of layers of television images on top of layers of film images and more and more virtual stuff. The computer games and simulations. We need an antidote to that. We need to acknowledge that we've built these layers of virtuality and that they are real, they are real virtual. They might not be actual but they are real still but that all of them are running on top of a material basis that ultimately informs the source of power and the basis of society.

But why adopt what seems at first glance like an inconsequential semantic shift? Why should we call the virtual element a material rather than immaterial? The answer lies in the enriched view of materiality that science has uncovered in the last 40 years, an enrichment that might be overlooked under the transcendental label of immateriality. Since the 1960's Nonlinear dynamics, also known as complexity theory or chaos theory, a field of applied mathematics, has revolutionized disciplines as disparate as physics, biology, economics and philosophy. It's most fundamental contribution (besides in-

spiring jurassic park) being the discovery of inherent structure to the seemingly random forms and events in life. Everything from the static on a telephone line to the formation.

of mountains to the fluctuations of stock markets display deep structural patterns and tendencies (attractors).

It is these patterns that give rise to the myriad shapes and events of reality. No longer is material (actual or virtual) an inert and lifeless substance that forces act upon to create forms and patterns, but rather, materials have self-organization, form and pattern immanent to them.

This understanding brings the most conceptual or immaterial art back into the realm of material research. An intervention into the structures and attractors of reality, tinkering with cultural, political and economic systems/institutions and their material properties. In the 2009 essay "Painting besides itself" David Joselit refers to Martin Kippenberg's call for painting to explicitly present the network in which the artwork is embedded. "Kippenberger's ... associates such as Michael Krebber, Merlin Carpenter, and ... Jutta Koether—have developed practices in which painting sutures a virtual world of images onto an actual network composed of human actors, allowing neither aspect to eclipse the other." This network (similar to Bourriaud's human relations) is a part of the metastructure surrounding and comprising any artwork. But this metastructure also extends into the matter/energy and associative/historical networks and flows of artwork and artist.

In other words the actual and virtual material structures and flows of art. An explicit reflection of this network within the artwork therefore becomes an attempt at discerning the true environment surrounding the work. It is a problem stating strategy in the way an organism's genetic material is emergently seeking to clearly ascertain the 'problem' of it's environment. And like organisms in ecological environments, its deployment also becomes a part of it's environment thus forming a Hofstadterian reflecting feedback loop. An artwork which has always been a reflection adjusts it's image to reflect it's self reflection.

This understanding also brings to light how artworks increasingly reflect their preeminent manifestation in the space of public perception (hype-space). Hype-space is the distributed and mediated space of catalogs, websites,

magazine articles and word of mouth. Artworks are experienced primarily through mediated channels and therefore in an attempt to ascertain "the problem" of it's environment, artworks are visualizing this dispersion.

But what one can also surmise from this is that the artworks originate in a virtual topological space before the actualization of galleries and hype-space. Artworks therefore are topological constructions that harness and interface with the metamaterial flows of our world. They consist of actual and virtual materials with myriad actual and virtual manifestations dispersed through actual and virtual channels.

The philosophical ramifications of this shift in perspective are far reaching. No longer is human civilization a sovereign anthropocentric endeavor, but rather it is the emergent property of the natural material world itself; thereby removing the separation between humans and nature, the synthetic and the natural. All of a sudden moral codification, reliant on an anthropic sovereignty, is invalidated at the metaphysical level making way for an immanent ethics. An ethics based on local causal affects rather than transcendent judgements of good or evil. Everything is self-signifying and no longer metaphor. The idea of extrinsic laws governing material behavior ceases and is instead replaced by emergence and immanent causality. Artists can uncluster social material assemblages into their component properties and reengineer them to develop new, de-stratifying results. No longer an appeal to theosophic metaphysicality but a realist metamateriality.

Timur Si-Qin

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INTERVIEW

Artspace

Is Art Just Another Ad? Timur Si-Qin on Why Artists Need to Embrace Their Brands

Super-slick and immediately attractive, Timur Si-Qin's installations and sculptures evoke hip window displays and billboards—at first glance. But if you're expecting a critique of consumer culture from the Berlin artist with a growing cult, you're a bit off. What he's doing is far smarter and far more unexpected than that.

Si-Qin's work, which references men's fashion companies like Axe and Hood By Air and often features his own pseudo-fashion brand PEACE, is less about ideology than ontology, specifically the object-oriented variety that's steadily pervading certain sectors of the art world. For Si-Qin (and fellow OOO adherents like Pamela Rosenkranz), objects and materials assert their own kind of power over viewers that goes far deeper than man-made economic systems. It's this theoretical foundation that upholds the charismatic appearance of his artworks.

As the ideas around his work have become more popular, so has Si-Qin; he's been featured in shows from Vienna to Taipei, and is now represented by the icy-cool Berlin gallery Société. This month is especially busy for the young artist, with a major work appearing in the DIS-curated Berlin Biennale and another installation being presented by Société in their Art Basel Statements solo booth next week. In between these international installs, Si-Qin carved out some time to speak with Artspace's Dylan Kerr about bringing a cult to an art fair, the evolutionary basis for advertising, and why, contra postmodern thought, he really believes the truth is out there.

What can you tell me about your piece at the Berlin Biennale?

The piece is called A Reflected Landscape, and it's from a new body of work that I've been working on for the past six months. It's an artificial landscape that is being reflected through media by its own mediated image. There's a large LED panel in the center of the installation playing footage from the system of live webcams [around] the room, as well as a couple videos that are typically about the landscape itself. For instance, there's a video of some foot-

age of the same landscape taken from above with a drone. I'm really interested in how matter recursively feeds off of itself, which is how life arises. Contemporary mediated culture also builds its structures in similar, iterative processes. It's an allusion to climate change as well, which is also a kind of feedback mechanism.

Is this at all related to the work you'll be presenting at Art Basel?

Yeah, it is. In the past, I was using this PEACE brand in different works. I see the brand as a kind of topological sculpture that can be expressed in various spaces and times. Now, I've rebranded PEACE to become NEW PEACE, and I'm structuring it as a kind of materialist cult from the future. In Basel, I'm presenting a prayer space video and installation for this future religion.

Like much of your recent work, these pieces seem to be playing with the ideas of Object-Oriented Ontology or other schools of thought that are quickly gaining currency in the art world. These ideas fly in the face of so much postmodern literary and art theory, which says that the only meaning things have are what we give them through language. What is it about these new philosophies that you think is especially relevant to the art conversation right now?

The reason I use commercial imagery is because I'm trying to go against the idea that all images are created or fully informed by ideology. This steps away from the psychoanalytic mode of art interpretation, where I think most art is coming from. You have a sign—like a commercial image—and that image is then interpreted as being a linguistic symbol for something like capitalism. I think that's almost a kind of stereotyping. The reason that advertising works is because it works on our brains. The reason that something like brand logos are everywhere is because that's how memory works — you have a sign with specific set of associations that you can memorize easily with this visual symbol. It has nothing, really, to do with any sort of school of economic thought. I ultimately think this is a path to a true ethics. If you can't take science to be true beyond the fact that it's a construction of one culture, then you can't really say that scientific statements are true. Look at the study of bees, for example—they can only see in ultraviolet light, so the only access that we have to bee consciousness is through science. The only way we can take a

bee—or any animal, or any human for that matter—to be real is from a realist point of view, to think that those beings are real and not just a projection of your own culture and language.

You're saying that science is the means by which we can posit that something like a bee or something like a person really exists outside of our perceptions.

Right. This is not to overemphasize science—I'm using it as a stand-in for the realist, materialist perspective that there is a real world out there that has nothing to do with my consciousness. From a postmodern perspective, that idea doesn't really work. I've heard arguments against New Materialism that say it's missing the subjective or human side of things, but I think ultimately this is the only way to get to that human side.

What is it about these ideas that make them so exciting for artists and thinkers today?

I actually don't think that so many artists are specifically reading up on these ideas. I think there's only a select group of artists who actually do read this stuff, but I also think that a lot of artists are responding to things that can be explained or framed by these ideas.

I'm interested in the connection you make in your writing between the attractiveness of an ad image and our evolutionary history, which primes us to pay more attention to certain forms, like faces or hands. How far are you willing to go with this idea? Is an evolutionarily ideal artwork possible?

There's a misconception about how evolution works. The idea of survival of the fittest isn't enough—it's a lot more complex than that, because these things are always so dynamic. Fitness is always a shifting landscape, and it's totally contingent on other factors in the environment. People who aren't super-familiar with the basics of contemporary evolutionary thought don't realize that it has nothing to do with achieving an ideal. It's more about temporary coagulations of traits that function in a certain time and place. There's this idea that biology and culture are separate from one another, but actually, from a contemporary scientific understanding of evolution, that divide isn't real. The two feed into each other, and you can't separate one from the other. That's actually what the Biennale piece is about, the reciprocal

feedback process by which these two spheres co-constitute one another. This idea is very similar to the Buddhist conception of causality.

Can you say more about this? What is the Buddhist conception of causality?

There is a very specific term, Pratityasamutpada, which I actually put in the wall text for the Biennale. It means dependent co-arising, which basically means that things constitute one another. It's a conception of causality that really only appears within Buddhism and Daoism—Hinduism doesn't have it—as well as contemporary systems theory and cybernetics.

Does the fact that these ideas turn up in realms as seemingly dissimilar as contemporary systems theory, ancient Eastern spiritual traditions, and upstart 21st century philosophies suggest to you that there's some real, material validity to them beyond mere coincidence? In other words, are you taking these ideas as capital-T true?

Being a realist, I think that these things are saying something real about the world. I think there is a real world, but it's not an essential world. That's the critical difference. I think everything is just a matter of relations and that it's all ultimately temporary and dynamic. My PEACE logo is actually an allusion to this. Originally, I was interested in how you could put different signs together and in doing so strip the meaning from them. I had the Daoist taiji [often referred to in the West as the "yin-yang symbol"] and the word peace, two things that don't necessarily have a relationship. I was interested in how you can combine and reuse these signs in different ways, thereby negating their previous meanings. The PEACE brand is only tangentially associated with the idea of peace—it's obviously not a political campaign for peace—but it takes the word and uses it in a way that is foreign to the lexical meaning. I think that's also an indication that there's no essence to words, just like there's no essence to signs either. It's all contingent.

Ethics and spirituality are topics many contemporary artists either ignore or deride. How would you describe the ethics that you're reaching for, and how do these spiritual traditions inform those ideas?

It's part of an exploration I'm undertaking. In this new speculative religion I'm working on

there's this slogan, "Replication Serves Variation." I'm building it with this idea that diversity and variation are ethical goals. In NEW PEACE, the world exists so that matter can experience all variations of itself. I think there's an ethics embedded within that, which is a celebration of diversity. I think this is part of the basis of these ancient Eastern philosophies as well.

In years past, a cool young artist employing commercial imagery was almost always assumed to be approaching the subject from an ironic or critical angle. In your work, that disapproving stance seems to be largely absent. How would you characterize your stance to the capitalist machines that you're working with?

That's really interesting. Most reviews that I've gotten have read my work as criticizing capitalism, and sometimes say I'm not criticizing it hard enough. For me, it's not about a critique of capitalism at all. I feel like there's another stereotyping process going on here. If you present an Asian person in a movie, for example, then that Asian psychoanalytically represents "China" or even all of Asia. In reality, people and things don't have to represent these greater things that are arbitrarily associated with them. The reason these commercial images have their form is because they've been selected for, which happens for various reasons. Cognitive load, for example—people like clean objects in their commercial environments because there's less to look at, meaning there's less for the brain to deal with. As a result, ads tend to be clean. This is why I reject the idea that you can just make something messy as a political act against commercialism or whatever larger entity you're opposed to. I think that's ultimately ineffective, and it misunderstands why images work the way that they do.

These works have intensely theoretical backgrounds, but of course you're making physical objects to be looked at and purchased. How important is an understanding of these theories to appreciating your artworks? And how do you make sure you're making works that function aesthetically as well as theoretically?

It's a really rare and new occurrence for me to have a conversation with someone like you where these topics are understood. That makes me pretty happy, but it's not something that I expect people to do. My work is very aesthetic, and part of that is my reading in the psychology of marketing and how images work. All of

that goes into the work, and I've relied on that a lot because I don't think a lot of this theoretical knowledge is out there. It's also hopefully not necessary, either. I'm happy that it is there, though, and I hope that it slowly leaks out to justify itself.

Are you more concerned with having a solid theoretical basis or with making an attractive object?

I think I can't really separate it. I wouldn't be happy without one or the other.

Interview by Dylan Kerr

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INTEVIEW

Leap Magazine
The Rules of Attraction with Timur Si-Qin

Artist Timur Si-Qin unveils his first solo exhibition in China, "Biogenic Mineral," at Magician Space in April 2015. For this exhibition, the artist presents the brand Truth by Peace (TBP) in sculpture and photography. LEAP talks to Si-Qin about attractors and their varying forms in his work.

LEAP Your work frequently makes use of commercial imagery and products, but you're less interested in an ideological or psychoanalytic perspective on these cultural entities than in their materialist realities—their biologically conditioned behaviors and the roots of attraction. You've been associated with the contemporary philosophical movement of new materialism. Is that the intellectual framework for your work?

Timur Si-Qin Yes, I was very much inspired by the writings of new realists such as Quentin Meillassoux, Levi Bryant, and especially the brilliant philosopher and shaman Manuel DeLanda, with whom I published an interview with a few years back.

LEAP And this realist-materialist position you're taking is by no means an antithesis to the cultural theories so dominant in our generation?

Timur Si-Qin Right. It's not that I'm not interested in or don't believe in the power that ideology holds over the world. But I don't think it's the whole story. I think Levi Bryant says it best, when he tries to "draw attention to the material dimensions of how we dwell and live. Today, more than ever, we need to reflect on whether the tools of deconstruction, phenomenology, psychoanalysis, Marxist critical theory, and semiotics are adequate to thinking the world we dwell in and how these theoretical orientations might erase the fundamental materiality of existence ... We need a form of theory capable of thinking that and that avoids the urge to treat everything as texts, meanings, and correlates of intentions." Meaning is not the entirety of being.

LEAP How do you think this realist movement influences art production?

Timur Si-Qin The way so much art and art criticism functions now is through this psychoanalytic model, where you produce a certain set of signs and then it's up to the critic to analyze them and attribute them to some sort of consciousness that might not even be the artist's. I think this model is too susceptible to a kind of pareidolia, seeing faces where there might not be any. Evolutionarily we have this propensity to identify something as consciousness out of self-protection. Similarly with capitalism: so much art writing today takes the form of psychoanalyzing capitalism, to the point that everything can be attributed to capitalism, with no real investigation whether there is an actual causal link or what that is actually linking to.

LEAP Frequently it's not the link that is missing, but what is being linked to. People often have very ill-informed ideas about capitalism and like to ascribe everything to this one banner, as if it's the only relevant governing force of our existence.

Timur Si-Qin The same applies to a cultural lens. When there's a real person whose arbitrary experiences and associations produce the work, there's no actual causal link where you can say this painting is the direct result of a certain culture. I think maybe new materialism could lead more artists to question how and why images work the way that they do. Beyond them simply being culturally coded symbols, what are the material dimensions by which they function, or what is the material context that makes culture code them this way in the first place? This is why advertising is so interesting to me, because its whole business is to understand these things, like the fact that shiny and reflective images are favored because of their subconscious connection to water, or the fact that people will prefer an image simply because it's brighter. I think simply being aware of these dimensions offers a small emancipation of free will.

LEAP Right. Your work with commercial objects and imagery highlights this biological layer that constructs our commercial and cultural landscape. Let's talk about your own construct of this seemingly commercial entity: the PEACE brand with a yin-yang symbol. How did you come up with it?

Timur Si-Qin The PEACE brand came out of thinking about the materiality of images. Obviously the use of brands has a material effect on

the world in that they cover almost all surfaces these days. To many this is a frightening encroachment of ideology, but I don't think that's the explanation for their existence. Brands have spread all over the world simply because of the way they access the brain and are stored in our memory, regardless of ideology or culture. On top of this, I'm interested in how modularity and plasticity are intrinsic to the world. Things can be used as things other than what they were predestined for. In biology this is called exaptation, when a trait evolves for one thing but ends up being used for another. For example, how dinosaurs evolved feathers initially for heat regulation but then eventually were able to fly with them. I think this is an insight into the freedom of our contingent reality and deconstructs the notion that biology is predetermined and immutable. I think this comes close to the buddhist notion of emptiness, in that nothing has an immutable essence. In developing the brand, I'm interested in using symbols this way. Combining disparate symbols, stripping them of much of their original meaning and repurposing them in a new way. In a way, I'm thinking about it metallurgically, treating the symbol in various ways to extract new material behaviors.

LEAP What's the idea behind Truth by Peace (TBP), the brand you created particularly for this show in Beijing?

Timur Si-Qin The brand is designed as a knock off of Hood by Air, or a play on that. It goes back to the idea of taking a word and stripping it of its meaning. What I like about Hood by Air is that it's just two very distinct words with no real associations. With Truth by Peace, I wanted this vague pop image—a hip-hop or K-pop look. The logo is based on an illustration I found on iStock. It serves as a general symbol of street style, Monster Energy, and so on. Its octagonal shape corresponds to that of a sculpture in the exhibition, which is a play on traditional Chinese landscaping.

LEAP The visual elements in this show are quite new to your practice. How did you arrive at these forms for this show?

Timur Si-Qin The show I did in 2013, "Basin of Attraction," was a first step for me to identify image attractors. But what constitutes an attractor can get very elaborate, much stranger than just stripped-down elements. Like Hood by Air, for example: it's registered as something really attractive, and so are traditional cultural motifs.

So in the new work, I'm trying to expand this idea of the attractor and show that it can apply to many things beyond the cold and sterile aesthetic I started out with.

LEAP Those earlier pieces relied on a pretty straightforward formula. The use of stock images emphatically calls attention to the underlying patterns and algorithms of commercial imagery. With this show, it seems like the attractors in your work are growing to be much more complex and comprehensive, with cultural references in a more trend-conscious fashion.

Timur Si-Qin What's fascinating about the attractor is the idea that there is a deeper reality to everything. The way things are structured, the geometry of reality, is a result of this deeper layer of topology. A good example DeLanda gives is that soap bubbles are round, and salt crystals are cubic, but both of them actually share the same attractor, because they're both energy minimization processes—finding the minimum amount of energy possible to hold its shape. So it's the same attractor that creates a sphere or a cube. But just because something is an attractor doesn't mean that it possesses some eternal or universal quality. It's just a random feedback loop.

LEAP To the average viewer, the link between the visual identity of TBP as a fashion brand and the rocks is quite peculiar. Beyond the fact that you treat these elements in a non-differential way—as simply materials—why choose these two highly disparate motifs?

Timur Si-Qin This exhibition has a pretty nerdy title, "Biogenic Mineral." It's an attempt to interpret culture as a geological process, in its generation of materials. What I'm trying to get at here is the diversity of reality. Rocks and strange constructs like brands belong to the same universe, and they're created by the same mechanisms. In philosophy, Levi Bryant often uses this term "flat ontology," which means that everything ultimately is the same, or just variations of the same thing; there's no hierarchy to ontology, everything just exists and should be treated equally, as opposed to a phenomenological perspective that privileges consciousness. Pairing these seemingly disparate forms is to prove this point.

LEAP In the outdoor shoots for TBP, elements of architectural constructs are also evident. Were you consciously trying to include these forms

as well?

Timur Si-Qin Definitely. These housing projects in China are really unique. You don't find them anywhere else. I've been thinking about China as this giant processor of materials and the effect it has on the planet. Here I'm trying to emphasize this geological process.

LEAP By making this analogy between culture and geology, you're inciting a refreshing view of our material culture, where the self-organizing behaviors of matter are made apparent.

Timur Si-Qin Culture is the self-organizing matter. The link I'm trying to draw is that us arranging matter for a funeral or a garden isn't so different from arranging matter for a commercial site, like an Abercrombie & Fitch store for instance. The mechanisms and processes that are involved are the same.

Interview by Lai Fei / Translated by Xia Sheng

Originally published in Leap Magazine, April 2015.

INTERVIEW

Artforum
Timur Si-Qin

In Timur Si-Qin's recent work, commercial and stock photography, as well as displays like those often found in malls and stores, are presented as biological relics. The first part—aptly titled “Part One”—of the Berlin-based artist's series “Premier Machinic Funerary,” 2014–, is featured in the latest edition of the Taipei Biennial, curated by Nicolas Bourriaud and on view at the Taipei Fine Arts Museum from September 13, 2014 through January 4, 2015.

‘Premier Machinic Funerary’ is made up of installations that resemble a form of hypercommercial ancestor worship. Essentially, they are funeral altars with 3-D printed scans of hominid fossils. More aptly, they're antifunerals, marking the reemergence of a life form through various phase transitions: from organism to fossil, from 3-D data to 3-D print. KNM ER 406, the fossil I'm focusing on for “Part One” in Taipei, was a male *Paranthropus boisei* who lived around 1.7 million years ago in what is now Kenya. Through technology and the ritual of contemporary art, this person is, in some way, being resurrected and, at least temporarily, prevented from having their particular arrangement of matter dissolve into entropy forever.

I try to make work that doesn't believe in the separation between culture and biology. To view humans as occupying a special role in the universe—and therefore as outside of nature and separate from other animals—is a theological belief that has no evidence. There never has been nor will there ever be anything “outside” of nature. Of course, just saying that something is natural doesn't mean that it is morally correct or that we shouldn't work to change it. Nature is inherently dynamic and chaotic, and life has always been about a two-way interaction with the environment. The environment changes life, and life changes the environment. The universe is a dance between entropy and complexity. Fortunately, and mysteriously, matter has a tendency to self-organize and determine its own being.

I'm interested in the way commercial images reveal the processes by which humans interpret and respond to the world around them—these are the fingerprints of our cultural image-search

algorithms. The interesting question is no longer whether or not the image is a construction, but rather in what ways this process is structured. Common and repeated “solutions” to commercial imagery—cheesy stock photos, pop music, and formulaic Hollywood movies—are all ingrained modes of culture that can tell us something about its materiality and tendencies. When one understands the tendencies of a material—like a blacksmith who grasps the tendencies of metals—one can use that knowledge to activate the item's capacities. In that way, a greater understanding of the materiality of culture may lead us toward unlocking its unrealized capacities.

Nicolas Bourriaud's book *The Radicant* (2009) probably falls closest to the context he's laid out for the biennial. In both, he emphasizes the importance of a globalized network, and it's an idea that others often miss when they focus on the impact of technology. The digital-native generation is different from previous generations because of the exponential access and confrontation with other cultures that the Internet allows, which facilitates a deprogramming or reverse engineering of one's own culture.

As told to Gabriel H. Sanchez

Originally published on <http://www.artforum.com/words/id=48153>, September 2014.

INTERVIEW

AQNB
An interview with Timur Si-Qin

In an article for *DIS Magazine*, ‘Stock Photography as Evolutionary Attractor’, artist Timur Si-Qin writes about the predominance of particular conventions in commercial imagery; “the perspiring beverage bottle crashing through ice” or “the porcelain-skinned woman splashing water on her face”. Rather than giving the usual critical theory-laden account of why certain image conventions proliferate, Si-Qin looks to a range of possible factors, including human physiology and evolution. “For example, humans can see clearer and in color in the center of our vision”, he writes, “contributing to the compositional convention of central placement.” The article is telling of Si-Qin's visual interest in everyday materials, one that seeks to situate them in an expanded context of human history and the natural world.

One of a growing number of post-internet artists associated with the contemporary philosophical movements of “New Materialism” and “Speculative Realism”, Si-Qin's works frequently seek to detract from the aura of human self-importance. Exploring materials that range from Axe body wash, to Yoga mats, to stock photography, Si-Qin's objects manage to both gently mock our preoccupations with health, appearance, virility, luxury, while linking such predilections to a pre-cultural era. When I ask (over email) why he thinks New Materialism resonates so strongly with visual artists, he responds, “I think, growing up, I was always enchanted by the natural world. New materialism is a philosophy that for the first time seems up to the task of acknowledging the myriad forms and shapes, animals and subjectivities, that seem to populate our contemporary experience.”

In *Basin of Attraction*, his first institutional solo show in Germany at the Bonner Kunstverein, Si-Qin created large-format digital images drawn from stock photography, as well as arrangements of bones (replicas of a hominid fossil) with patterned surfaces. It has long been the case in found-object art that materials be largely understood in the context of their recent social history. For Si-Qin, this is only one of multiple concerns regarding the way we make sense of materials, a view that incorporates

form and structure as well knowledge from a range of disciplines. A stock image of “storied farmer's hands sifting through bags of freshly roasted, aromatic coffee beans”, blown-up and mounted on a lightweight free-standing frame, comes straight from any advertising display in a suburban shopping centre. But Si-Qin does not draw attention to an object's ubiquity to create kitsch, but rather to interrogate the broader question of why patterns reoccur so persistently. Chatting with Si-Qin over Skype, he is every bit as precise and theoretically focused as I have come to expect from his exhibition texts, easily traversing the various concepts and systems of knowledge that loosely fall under the rubric of new materialism.

aqnb: Basin of Attraction explored your interest in stock and commercial photography, particularly in the recurring patterns we see in these images and their evolutionary genesis.

TS: Right, I'm interested in the deep chains of causality underlying the patterns we see in contemporary image culture. As well as the actual ways by which images are consumed and processed. The hyper-commercial aesthetic is a reflection of the contingent nature by which these recurring patterns arise. Patterns created by the interaction of instinctual and associated affects, as well as economic and political contingencies that manifest this whole global, cross-cultural aesthetic.

aqnb: As someone from a generation where cultural studies and visual culture studies have been so dominant, it's interesting to think about these other factors, evolutionary and biological for example. Do you think these get overlooked most of the time?

TS: I think they do often get overlooked. Because there's little way of making sense of evolutionary or pre-cultural factors in a post-modern framework. But I think their introduction marks a turn away from the post-modern emphasis on language and cultural construction and towards a renewed emphasis on the objective and the material (without sacrificing subject and identity), like that found in philosophy in recent years under the banners of ‘new materialism’ or ‘speculative realism.’ I think the important thing to keep in mind, is that culture is an extension of biology, that it is a powerful adaptation in and of itself, but represents only a part of the spectrum of the full human/animal experience.

aqnb: Which of your works were included in the Bonn exhibition? I understand you made 3D prints from fossils.

TS: Yeah, there are these three constellations, each consisting of a strain of commercial pop-up display and a vitrine with the 3D printed remains of a hominid teenager that lived in South Africa 1.5 – 2 million years ago. Each vitrine has different versions of the same individual, the same person that once lived. I was able to retrieve the digitalisation of his remains and make copies. I think what interests me about it is this causal history of shape and pattern, that the shapes of this person are echoing through time in varying guises; first before he was alive, through his ancestors, then after his death, the shapes were stored in fossilised rock, and now they've been scanned, digitized and 3d printed, but it's still the same echo, the same shapes. In some ways I think the same thing goes for stock photos.

aqnb: This idea reminds me of your work with ergonomic products. They are both about a trace of the human body.

TS: True, but I think the human part is arbitrary. I'm fascinated by animal bodies and nature in general, humans being is what we contingently connect with the most because we happen to be humans. Morphogenesis and vestigiality are the topics I'm really interested in.

aqnb: Are you especially interested in these things as they relate to commodity culture? Commodity culture is a realm where we might least expect to find traces of our ancestry, it seems to come so directly from the here and now.

TS: I guess what I try to reflect is that there are these deeper older forces at play in the construction of the contemporary experience. That even though things are getting more sci-fi by the year, we owe the makeup of our reality in large part to the self organizing behaviour of matter (including human organization), which is the oldest story of all. However, I think that by acknowledging this causal history, it in no way results in any sort of determinism. In fact, I think it provides access to an ever greater flexibility of the future.

aqnb: Yes, I think actually talking about these things might help to shift some of the older

myths about evolution and biology that persist today, that are more essentialist.

TS: Yes, totally, it's a pity how much these myths about evolution persist, especially in the humanities. Some equate an evolutionary lens with social-darwinism or genetic determinism. Both of which are based on false understandings of the radically flexible and non-teleological nature of evolution. Nature by way of evolution is inherently queer, generated only through variation and difference.

aqnb: Was this a consideration in your works using Axe products? The Axe brand plays so much on these outdated ideas of scent and pheromones being able to trigger a response in the opposite sex. At the same time, the products also exploit very real evolution-based desires.

TS: I think what interested me was not so much the truth of the claims of the product, which is obviously over the top teenage boy catnip, but that a campaign and product like that can be as effective today as it is, which is again evidence of the power of the vestigial.

aqnb: It must be! Axe is such an object of ridicule but remains so popular.

TS: Right, it's a fossil. The bottles themselves look like fossils too. I think those pieces were successful in being a joke and being serious and enchanted by its subject at the same time, which is something I strive for. Like the stock cosmetics style portraits of females, which to me represents the opposite side of the spectrum of over-expressed male/female duality.

aqnb: In both instances, I was fascinated by your ability to make these objects even more extreme in a way, piercing the Axe bottles with swords, blowing up the stock images.

TS: Yeah, I suppose it's a way of creating some distance, but I'm also interested in riding this thin line between being critical of something and being complicit with it. I think because ultimately the distinction is maybe not there, or rather, that things are always more complicated than any simple duality.

aqnb: You're currently in a group show in Kassel at the Fridericianum; Speculations on Anonymous Materials. I thought the press text for

this was interesting, it seemed to link the artists involved by the way they approach materials, instead of say, under the banner of post-internet art.

TS: Yeah I'm happy that for the first time there is a major exhibition of this generation that is moving beyond the post-Internet label. I think maybe the topics of medium-specificity and network technologies, subject matters that post-Internet seems to embody, are not sufficient in capturing a deeper generational shift. I think, ironically enough, what that label obfuscates is the true extent to which the internet and computers in general have changed our perception of the world.

The digital age has taught us that digital materials behave and are as real as physical materials, and vice versa, and that matter and reality is programmable, i.e. 'the hackability of everything'. So what it comes down to, what's really happening to our generation is maybe an expansion of the idea of materiality, one that counts everything, from Spanish to aluminum to Samsung as a material, each with its own manipulable properties and capacities.

aqnb: There also seems to be a different, less formal attitude towards materials, in letting materials speak for themselves, rather than reflect the process of the artist.

TS: Yeah, I think you're right; letting materials do what they want as a reflection of their contingent nature. One interesting thing is the repeated manifestations of certain things in this show and amongst the work of our generation, for example heads and hands. In a realist-materialist framework one can explain why images of faces and hands are especially able to connect to the viewer: we have special neural structures designed to process faces, and mirror neurons to feel the posture of hands which are a part of the body very densely populated with nerves. So in art as well as advertisement, we have come to understand that these images have an affectual weight. Their repeated use can therefore be thought of as an expression of the material properties and tendencies of our social/image world. I think our generation is intuiting this shift.

Interview by Jane Parker

Originally published in Aqnb, November 2013.

REVIEW

T The New York Times Style Magazine
Three Young Artists Interpret Reality in a
Digital Era

"What if everything we think is real is just an illusion?" began A. O. Scott's review of the 1973 made-for-German-TV movie by Rainer Werner Fassbinder, "Welt Am Draht" (in English, "World on a Wire"). Now, the title of that sci-fi film has been repurposed by the collector Julia Stoschek for the inaugural show in her new Berlin space, which brings together a contingent of multimedia artists who are likewise reevaluating the meaning of reality — this time in the digital era. The works — which include videos, live simulations, performances and sculptures — range from satirical cultural commentaries to visualizations of future metropolises. Here, three of the creators, all born in the mid-'80s, explain their contributions.

Si-Qin's "Welt Am Draht" pieces span three bodies of work (and five years) — and illustrate both his technique's refinement and his continual fixation on symbols. Born in Berlin to a German mother and an Mongolian-Chinese father, and raised in Arizona when his mother married an Apache man, the artist directed his attention to "the regularities between cultures and how commercial imagery is often such a peculiar regularity," he says. "I'm interested in moving away from a psychoanalytic paradigm of art interpretation, in which signs can often be arbitrarily associated with meanings — and any commercial image is interpreted as a signifier of capitalism — but images can be stripped of meaning, revealing their lack of essence."

Hilary Moss

Originally published on <http://nyti.ms/1RQWF-dK>, June 2016.

REVIEW

Boston Hassle
Some Thoughts on Timur Si Qin and Tao Lin

Timur Si Qin's work explores the spacing of contemporary late modernity with a glamorous insistence that is absolutely infuriating, and yet it is in research such as his, which refuses the sub-ironic withdrawal of so much bland post-internet artwork, that we discover a way out of the maze of the hyperglamour of the interface. Timur Si Qin, like the writer Tao Lin, is a master of annihilation. In experiencing his work authentically, we find ourselves practically burning up in a hyper-rarified aura of plastic phosphorescence and slippery surfaces. Likewise with Lin, "stupidity" becomes the very surface of the so-called unconscious, involuting the facial presentation of self in a continuous slipping out of identity into differential hyperchaos.

Axe Effect, a veritable masterpiece of twenty-first century art-making, is like an artifactual lifeline extended to the trembling fingers of the flaneur, who can barely lift his opium pipe, having already drowned his Baudelairean superfluity in a mask of chaotomic eroticism. The maniacal laughter of the "hipster" who has found himself as, to put it in a Hegelian manner, the absolute coming to itself, is usually hidden in the heartrendingly loud noise of oafish intellectuals grasping at some ineffable philosopher's stone, when this very object is nothing other than the attitude of certainty that they are too pious to assume.

For example, the jadedness of Tao Lin's characters, which is indistinguishable from a kind of primordial innocence, is nothing like any of the commonplace jadednesses any post-modern quasisubject can find at his corner art gallery or zine stand, inasmuch as it derives its surprising force from the very "death" that lingers like a malevolent ghost in the pages of Lin's great novel, "Taipei", waiting to usurp the meandering consciousnesses of its suicidal protagonists, threatening to suddenly leer in front of us, like a demon created out of some literary black magic. "Paul began to feel, in a way he hadn't before, like he comprehended double suicide—the free and mysterious activity of it, like a roller coaster descending only into darkness, but accessible from anywhere [emphasis mine], on the theme park of Earth, always open." There is a similar if not even more

intense existential violence in Si Qin's work, for example in Axe Effect, where a kind of ritual is devised by superimposing a sword onto a series of bottles of Axe-branded "shower gel", the hyper-catheted ooze of its very brandedness approaching us like the bloody remnant of some proto-religious sacrifice, schizophrenically inviting us to taste the deliciously rounded and ergonomically available edges of the perfect hypercapitalist package, a container from which we liberate a suprising energy, a kind of industrial perfume. It is as if we were now invited, as viewers, as consumers of the artistic lifestyle-brand, to experiment, to take part in the very ritual implied by Si Qin's sculpture, baptizing ourselves in the stink of Axe products while chanting or just ecstatically melting. The addictiveness that Heidegger identified as a salient feature of "everydayness" looms large here, as we are invited to slip vertiginously into a kind of compulsion-to-experiment, to become "ferociously religious" as Georges Bataille put it, and discover in capitalism not merely a cult of money but a religion of energy (Cf Bataille, "The Accursed Share"). When Lin says that the air is "paranormally ventilated", or describes "a pale fence with the colorless, palatially melancholy glow of unicorns", we are precisely in the world of the aura, plain and simple, and Si Qin is by virtue of the same logics of energy and magical immediacy a kind of hypershaman who creates from the hyperfeminine stickiness of commercial cosmetic ads a kid of surface-of-cathexion or magic writing pad by which we can agree to participate in an exercise in aided self-hypnosis, turning consumerist banality into a kind of playful sorcery of the image, a kind of "art of memory" a la Bruno, or a Castaneda- esque "dreaming", which is, in a sense, already the "initiation into evil" that Georges Bataille made the rule of great literature as such.

Consider the figure of the "traitor", for whom Dante reserved the "worst" circle of hell, the perpetually unlucky person who is damned by their lack of principles to a permanent exile, damned to be a stranger, a monster, a kind of pirate... maybe what we are describing is the artist, Nietzsche's revolutionary man of the future, a sort of untimeliness... In short, in Lin's work we discover Beckett's principle that the ascent to heaven and the fall into hell are the same thing. With Si Qin, we are given already the image of this hell, as a kind of secret token threatening to become a tool in the hands of the one who makes of the imaginatio (imaginative faculty, transcendental schematism) a machine

courageously for defying so-called "reality", flying in the face of good manners, good taste, and good breeding. In short, what is at stake is a kind of inhuman-superhuman *ἐπιχώρη* that would liberate us from the ethical, teleologically suspending it for the inwardness of the knight of faith, which is perhaps nothing other than the "hipster" who discovers that, in Lin's words, he is "already, always orphaned".

James Krendel-Clark

Originally published on <https://bostonhassle.com/some-thoughts-on-timur-si-qin-and-tao-lin/>, November 2016.

REVIEW

Frieze Magazine
Timur Si-Qin, Carl Kostyál, London

Timur Si-Qin's sculptures have, for the past few years, stemmed from a consistent, prolonged and generally reasonable conflation of radical biological and evolutionary theory, commercial and retail visual tropes, and state-of-the-art technologies of production and display. They've been divisive from the start. Si-Qin's sleek, iconoclastic objects have been alternately celebrated and derided for their apparent artlessness: both in the sense that the works lack 'art', doing away with aesthetic principles in favour of commercial and evolutionary mantras, and in the apparent sincerity or guilelessness with which this is done.

The white funerary wreath (Untitled, all works 2014) that hung on a tripod in the first room of Si-Qin's exhibition 'Premier Machinic Funerary: Part II' was dually apt. It commemorates the speculative death of a human subject (à la post-humanism) – also evoked by two plinths each housing a 3D-printed scan of a proto-humanoid skull. Equally, the wreath, along with three bouquets of white, decaying flowers, signified the natural expiry of categories such as 'art' and 'artist' in favour of biological-commercial principles (which contain, like the art world, their own systems of production, value attribution, selection, circulation and decay). Si-Qin's exhibition was hence framed as a 'funerary' for a human subject who has completely lapsed into hyper-commercialism. 'Posthuman' might also stand for 'post-artist': what might art become without the image of artist as ego-driver of production? Need we view any of this as art, or might art productively become retail, biology, ritual devotion or, simply, gift-exchange?

These questions might seem absurd, but Si-Qin is gravely serious. In addition to the two vitrine-plinths (Skull Coffin Manifold KNMWT 17000 and Skull Coffin Manifold KNMER 1813) and the untitled funerary wreath, the exhibition comprised displays showing, with no real distortion, empty, cold, contemporary retail imagery: three large, Abercrombie & Fitch-inspired black and white photographs showing male and female models in a pastoral lake setting, backlit with an LED light system (In Memoriam 1, 2, and 3), and a UV canvas print (Campaign for PEACE) covered in yin-yang symbols and

the word 'PEACE'.

Peace here seemed to imply both 'R.I.P.' and 'peace on earth'. The dual premises of this exhibition – and of Si-Qin's works to date – coalesce into a forceful equation: the death of art as a return to innocence. Hence the representational impeachability of the Zen mirror referred to in the exhibition's press release and booklet as, 'thoroughly egoless and mindless [...] everything is revealed as it is.' The claim is: in an age of the post-subject, an image cannot comment or re-present, but only present the culture that begets it.

This conjecture is troubling not on account of its cynicism (perhaps, more cynically still, there is no cynicism), but because Si-Qin's claims are so logical and consistent. His work is remarkable for already having, like a mirror, counterclaims to much of what can be said against it. Is it commercial? Yes. Is it art? Maybe not, but nobody has it required them to be, aside from the viewer and his or her expectations. Is it good? Does it sell?

There is some truth and self-awareness here: the supposition seems to be that, in terms of labour practices, artists need not in fact 'make' anything anymore, so the category of 'artist' might be seen as empty (or all-encompassing). There is often little outside of the conventions of a sometimes anachronistic art world to distinguish an artist from, say, a designer, commercial photographer, choreographer, entrepreneur or mere celebrity. Several other industries have done away with such terminology altogether, in favour of more ecumenical expressions ('creatives').

But the political notion undergirding this deliberate naivety – in the sense that the work has a real idealistic faith in processes of evolution and capitalism – is that of non-accountability on the part of the art. While the works appear to advance a position on art's relationship to commerce and evolution, they ultimately shirk the consequences of this link back onto the viewer and, in doing so, refuse to acknowledge the issues that they themselves (their sale; their circulation) perpetuate. Still, as tough as it might be to admit, Si-Qin's science-fictional exhibition provokes real questions about viewership, industry, circulation, labour and the future of art, questions that we best not avoid, lest we fall into the opposite end of non-reflection. In fact, the exhibition's ideas, on the part of art or post-

art, are not new: in his realist novel *The Red and the Black* (1830), Stendhal wrote that art could be 'a mirror carried along a high road. At one moment it reflects [...] the azure skies, at another [...] the puddles at your feet.' The problem, alas, with such effortless non-reflection is that no mirror can account for at least one fact: that of its own history.

Pablo Larios

Originally published in *Frieze*, January 2015.

REVIEW

Blouin ArtInfo

Timur Si-Qin // Carl Kostyál, London

The night before I saw Si-Qin's exhibition, I waited at a bus stop with some friends. It was late and we were tired, so I leaned against the led-lit billboard at the station. The light made my skin look sickly, someone said, which was surprising because the model in the denim advertisement seemed so healthy, vivid.

The language of marketing, its aspirational imagery—youthful, alluring, alive—and the narrow space between the pale and the rosy-cheeked is exactly what informs Si-Qin's work. In "Axe Effect," 2011–13, a series of sculptures in which the famous deodorant brand for teenage boys is stabbed by a sword, its neon-colored liquid dripping out, he ridicules the product's materiality but also the "Axe effect" in its slogan: the idea that using the deodorant will get you girls. The artist's disenchantment with false representation is addressed with a much more sophisticated technique in this new project.

Walking into the gallery, the viewer is confronted with the same visual language described above: There are three large light boxes displaying images of two shirtless, attractive young men and a scantily dressed girl. They look like a denim or perfume ad—actually, they look like a generic ad for any lifestyle product. At the bottom of the image is a stylized logo reading "peace," which is reminiscent of the Pepsi trademark.

At first, it seems vibrant and seductive, but the show's title is "Premier Machinic Funerary Part II ." There are white lilies in the corner and a garland at the entrance to the space, all setting the stage for the funerary installation in the center of the gallery: two five-foot-high boxes encasing 3-D-printed scans of ancient hominid fossils. These cases look more like futuristic artifacts of unknown use than coffins; they're also emblazoned with the Pepsi/peace sign and are equipped with lights that change colors, only enhancing their synthetic glitz.

Seeing Si-Qin's images, I wondered if the model at the bus stop really did look alive. Advertising, with its twodimensional billboards, shallow messages, and interchangeable characters,

has a flattening quality. The body in Si-Qin's pieces is divided into fragments: a skull, six-pack abs, a crop top. The image he offers of the body mediated by technology is enticing, curious, and dark. But the funereal may be a bit too easy a topic: Conflate the cloying smell of the lilies in the space with the colors, and the young people with the fossil, to create a certain contrast between the living— that fleshy, emotional, hopeful thing that is a human being— and the nonliving beings in the casket. Si-Qin's is a muddled vision of society that emphasizes artificial materiality. Should we read it as a cautionary tale? There are no clear-cut claims in the series itself, which is shown here in its third iteration. However, there is a limit to how productive ambiguity can be: Si-Qin's images are haunting and memorable, but hopefully this project will shape into a statement rather than a rehashing of ideas in similar forms.

Orit Gat

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REVIEW

Financial Times
Refraction. The Image of Sense, Blain Southern
Gallery, London

In "Premier Machinic Funerary", currently at the Taipei biennial, Timur Si-Qin imagines funerals for 3D printout scans of human fossils, placed in gaudy vitrines decorated with flowers and set in retail environments to insist that there is "no separation between culture and biology". In southern California, Michael Manning has made "Microsoft Store Paintings", created in-store on the shop's computers, utilising software including ready-made hyper-realistic 3D models. In Berlin, Oslo-born Lars TCF Holdhus — the initials stand for The Contemporary Future — fuses visual art with software-derived electronic music: his "Tiny Encryption Algorithm" release comes with screen-printed bags of green tea, a tea leaf image and a download code.

How do such works fit into exhibitions? Perhaps YouTube or Tumblr are better habitats for art of the networked society than the white walls of a gallery. In Refraction, Norwegian curator Peter Amdam takes on post-internet artists of an emerging generation, all aged around 30: six northern Europeans, including Si-Qin and Holdhus, plus Manning, and Australian Michael Staniak, whose hologram-like paintings are inspired by digital media and explore how its flattening aspect affects our viewing.

Juxtaposed with them is one of the earliest works of video art, Bill Viola's "Information" (1973), a pioneering investigation into interrupted, distorted visual and sound patterns which began with a technical mistake, when a videotape recorder tried to record itself, leading Viola to experiment with "sitting at the switcher... playing it like a musical instrument". Amdam sees this art-from-accident as anticipating the "post-human" agency of the web, which now "stores, directs and administers our memories, dreams, affections, desires, longings, beliefs, afflictions, fears, perversions, morals, finances, political convictions and even bodily movement", changing the way art is conceptualised and experienced.

Jackie Wullschlager

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REVIEW

Mousse Magazine
Instrumental Assistance at Galerie Andreas
Huber, Wien

There are groups within society that sleep with "instrumental assistance" and those that do not. Citing this example and similar ones, in 1934 Marcel Mauss deconstructed the idea of seemingly natural human motion sequences through his cultural-anthropological classification of "bodily techniques." What is more, social systems and structures become inscribed in the body, which is always impacted by society.

During the period in which Mauss lived, an example of the instrumental support to which so many societies had become accustomed would be, for example, the bed. And today it certainly remains equally popular. However, the development that has most strongly influenced the bodily socialization of our time is undoubtedly the advancing technical development and digitalization of our living and working environments.

This has led to the bed frequently being used as an extended working space in this day and age. And even if one's own profession does not lend itself to this habit, the two supporting instruments of bed and laptop nevertheless tend to be combined rather often. It is from what is conceivably the most private place that we engage with global events, without needing a body to do so. And yet the bed in particular, with its anthropomorphic dimensions, is both reminder and evidence of one's own corporeality. Whether we like it or not, we are bound to the bed and are subject to certain restrictions, even if the screen-based reality suggests otherwise. It acquaints us with other perceptual patterns of space, distance, and communication. Moving into the background along with sensorial experience are qualities of transience and an inability to arbitrarily repeat, call up, and access. Indeed, one's own bed can be a comforting and grounding corrective factor.

"Instrumental Assistance" focuses upon our access to the world, the means we use to gain this and ultimately, also to the transformation of this approach in the digital age. However, Camille Flammarion's dystopian science-fiction vision Omega: The Last Days of the World (1893) provides evidence that the desire for the most

comfortable participation possible in literally everything that happens in the world is not, as one might assume, a product of our age. An illustration from the novel depicts a so-called telephonoscope, an apparatus which is able to project a kind of livestream of events happening in the world onto the wall opposite the bed.

Following on from this introduction, we arrive at Timur Si-Qin's yoga mats fused with aluminium plates that represent a contemporary version of the bed from the late nineteenth century and are placed opposite Tabor Robak's video projection 20XX. In a similar way to the bed, the yoga mats refer to our corporeality, but at the same time embody Marcel Mauss' theory of the cultural dependence upon various bodily techniques and rituals, inasmuch as they demonstrate the differences between the East and West. From the position of the yoga mat, one is virtually looking out onto Robak's fantastical urban landscape, a composite of the artist's favourite cities. One is veritably borne aloft through a generically futuristic cityscape comprising prototypical blocks of flats, modern infrastructure and innumerable advertising banners. The edits between individual scenes are made with the aid of water droplets and streaks on the supposed camera lens. Only thus does materiality find its way into this virtual scenario; similar, then, to the yoga mats which are reduced in their very materiality – because when we are dependent upon our bodies for the ubiquitous compulsion of self-optimisation, they should, in their immaculate states, at least bear witness to our discipline and overall levels of performance.

The central exhibition room contains works taken from the Canadian artist, Jon Rafman's ongoing series entitled "Brand New Paint Job" commenced in 2010, in which he engages with the designing of our environment, a topic entirely in keeping with our era. Our actions are becoming increasingly disembodied, which also has a concomitant effect on the creation of environment: immaterial and replete with images and programmes garnered online. Rafman uses 3-D programmes to combine two-dimensional masterpieces from art history readily available as digitalised illustrations from the websites of museums or auction houses. Thus Rafman is systematically following the lead of the virtual world: everything accessible online is homogeneous, equipollent. And so he provokes painting with its own greatest fear: it becomes decoration, wallpaper. In both videos,

Lybov Popova and El Lissitzky Office Complex and Juan Gris Dream Home (both 2013, each 2:10 mins), as well as both prints Schiele Classroom and Klimt Kitchen, Rafman has trained his focus upon the difference between work and leisure, office and home. Rafman has especially chosen the artists Popova, Lissitzky and Gris for his virtual architectural tours because of the emphasis they placed on Cubofuturism and Constructivism. Both prints were produced for the exhibition and thus refer to the two Austrian masters.

And yes, there is an actual bed at the end of the exhibition, namely Tom Burr's intriguing work Notes on Camp from 2011. From a purely formal point of view, this work is a counterpart to the others by artists from a younger generation: a folding camp bed with an open book as opposed to yoga mats and self-made virtual worlds. However, with regard to mobility and flexibility, the folding bed is already a step ahead of Flammarion's nineteenth-century version. Tom Burr's suggested piece of bedtime reading is none other than Susan Sontag's collection of essays Against Interpretation, opened at page 277 and her "Notes on Camp" from 1964. Decisively, Sontag cemented the definition of the term "camp" in the mainstream as a style of exaggeration, kitsch and a key element in a gay, political aesthetic. According to Sontag, this specific form of aestheticism conforms to the maxim: "It's good because it's awful." If you will, this instruction for reception can be applied to screen-based art considered by some to be a somewhat suspect aesthetic. It doesn't serve a socio-political agenda in this context, demonstrating instead a contemporary method of distribution, the homogenisation of different values, as well as the accessibility and disposability of everything for everyone. Ultimately, the essential point Sontag is making in this collection is the critique of criticism: she singles out overly complex interpretations of artworks responsible for an increasing anaesthetisation of our senses which, in turn, deprives us of a sensory experience of art. A bed as the immediate reference to our own corporeality: it doesn't come much more sensory than that. We are now faced with the question of how to respond to the new technologies and instruments, as well as the art which emanates from it, in a way that Susan Sontag would approve.

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REVIEW

Mousse Magazine

Timur Si-Qin "Basin of Attraction" at Bonner Kunstverein

In his first solo institutional exhibition in Germany, Timur Si-Qin (born 1984 in Berlin, lives and works in Berlin) has developed a project that generates an ambivalent echo between his works and the body.

The artist grew up in Germany, the United States and China, studied fine arts at the University of Arizona and returned to Berlin several years ago. His works have already been shown in Los Angeles, Milan, Paris and Berlin, among other places. In his project for the Bonner Kunstverein, arrangements of 3D prints play a central role. The artist used 3D scans of Paleolithic hominid fossils of a certain individual belonging to the natural history collection of a South African museum and printing them as objects. Their surfaces feature cosmic nebula, hunting camouflage patterns or pictures from supermarket advertising brochures. SI-QIN's way of employing these patterns causes diverse levels to encounter each other: the ornament as a primordial gesture with a contemporary pictorial language, the temporal dimension of the stars with those of the bones and primeval hunting with grocery shopping. These objects, simultaneously original sculptures and ornamented replicas of bones, trigger questions dealing with tradition and the link between today and yesterday.

The "bone arrangements" lay in the immediate vicinity of lightweight structures made from PVC and aluminum that are usually used for stands at trade fairs. They are entirely covered with advertising stock images. Their selection results from the artist's ongoing reflection about instinctive human primal reactions to visual stimuli and mechanisms of attraction that have been trained by survival strategies and which continue to condition us today. SI-QIN is fundamentally interested in rethinking the conventional division between culture and nature. He references in the process philosophical approaches linked to the theory of evolution that explore such abstract concepts as taste or desire from the perspective of biology and neuroscience.

The artist references visual elements of contemporary culture in his exhibition, but he reveals their connection to biologically conditioned pri-

mal phenomena of attraction, thus pointing to the timelessness of certain pictorial elements. SI-QIN addresses a time in his exhibition that still conditions us biologically, but which we have no conscious memory of.

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REVIEW

Frieze d/e
Timur Si-Qin

Situating Timur Si-Qin's work within a critical taxonomy is not easy. His oeuvre seems to be influenced by the Internet – not as a technology but as a matter of course. The term Net Art hardly captures his medium, although he did set up the online virtual Chrystal Gallery in 2010 to exhibit art works by other artists in what appeared to be a classic white cube. Although Si-Qin grew up with the Internet, one can't help wondering if he is making works that defy categorization, despite their dependence on new media technology – a quality he shares with other artists whose biographies alone give them the digital native's experience of the Internet, from Oliver Laric to Daniel Keller and Nik Kosmas of AIDS-3D.

In interviews, Si-Qin speaks in abstract terms about the theories behind his practice, claiming that his oeuvre deals with cognitive patterns, with the thresholds, breaks and continuities between intuition and instinct, art and nature, technology and poetry and even the interplays between system and individual, between medium, mimesis, morphology and ontology. Yet the works themselves possess a discrete and captivating clarity. In his 'Custom Interior' show (2011) at Berlin's Mark & Kyoko project space, ergonomic leather upholstery and office chairs appeared as the dying gasp of a long outdated prosthesis theory à la Marshall McLuhan. Whereas technical media once stretched beyond us into the future, today computer-aided design software can calculate our physical interconnections with any object to create an artificial leather, dust-repellent, buttock- and spine-friendly continuum between humankind, technology and work. These ergonomic options are explored in a sleek pamphlet *Custom Interior* (2011), which looks like a cross between an advert for trainers, a luxury car and a gaming console. In *Axe Effect* (2011), plastic bottles of the Axe brand of shower gel are impaled by Samurai and knight's swords or mounted on the wall like hunting trophies, slowly bleeding to death in a lurid, thanato-erotic display as the gel dripping down the wall creates random combinations of shapes and colours. In an accompanying text, Si-Qin writes about 'the contingent epic of evolution [...], the arms race [and] product placement (as an evolutionary process in itself)' – as if advertising were a kind

of _logos spermatikos.

The installation *MAINSTREAM* (2011) – created for the eponymous show at Société Berlin – was equally simple and effective. The artist printed out 33 posters for Michael Bay's sci-fi action film *Transformers* (2007) and hung them in cheap metal frames, only to press leaves from ferns and other plants between the poster and the frame's glass. The pressed leaves look like so many specimens in a natural history museum while blending ornamentally with the pictures of the Transformer robots behind them. The posters – shown in two rooms – followed the good versus evil divide prominent in the film: The good Autobots are characterized by clear industrial designs based on American cars of the postwar boom years and appear more 'human' than the evil Decepticons, which look like insects, in tones of earth and stone, crudely appealing to feelings of revulsion and fear. Other battles emerged in his 'Legend' show at Milan's Galerie Fluxia in 2011. Si-Qin asked the two women gallerists to blast holes in replicas of knight's armour – chain-mail coat, breastplates, helmets and gloves – with a range of firearms, from Glocks to Kalashnikovs. In the gallery, two flat-screen monitors showed video footage of the ballistic performance while the injured armour hung from plasma-TV suspensions on the wall and on standard clothes-racks. Although The Cramps's single 'Bikini Girls With Machine Guns' (1990) may come to mind, the many-layered quality of Si-Qin's works keeps the associations flowing: from discourses on war, gender and evolutionary concepts to the turbo-charged, neo-materialist, morphogenetic theories developed by Manuel De Landa or Brian Boyd, whom the artist cites as key philosophical points of reference. In addition to writing essays, Si-Qin pens texts to accompany most of his works; neither manifestos, nor artist statements, these texts seem to act as appendages expanding his own thinking. 'Maybe an art work is also an organism, sending and navigating its environment, responding to the call of its exterior,' he writes in *Custom Interior*. Whatever the call, the response appears as a curious hybrid of nature, culture and media technology.

Translated by Nicholas Grindell
Paul Feigelfeld

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REVIEW

Art Review
Timur Si-Qin: Legend

If cowboys and Indians are definitely out of date, medieval knights still rank among the stars of the entertainment industry. They persuasively embody the macho hero in several contemporary chansons de geste — songs of deeds — ranging from the founding myths of secessionist parties (like Italy's Northern League, with its medieval warrior symbol) to fantasy books, movies, TV series, robot cartoons and videogames. Some people even strive to bring chivalry back to reality, dressing up and performing tournaments during local festivals, tightrope-walking between folklore and adult cosplay. Preparing for his first exhibition at Fluxia, Berlin-based Timur Si-Qin followed this ludic thread: after learning that the father of Valentina Suma, one of the two young dealers running the gallery, regularly participates in medieval reenactments, the artist asked her to organise a fieldtrip to her hometown, Oria, in Southern Italy. Once there, Si-Qin asked Suma and the gallery's other director, Angelica Bazzana, to embrace real firearms and play in front of the camera — the 'girl with a gun' being another alluring character, I guess — while using, as a target, a contemporary remake of a suit of armour owned by the father.

All of this became part of the exhibition in Milan. On a darkened double screen played the video of the shooting session (the artist also posted it on his website and on YouTube, under the title *Italian Girls Shoot AK-47 at Pieces of Medieval Armor*). All around, meanwhile, Si-Qin suspended – on cheap coat hangers and mounting brackets for televisions – the damaged breastplate, gloves, helmet and coat of mail, their wafer-thin layer of metal visibly torn up by bullets. The only spot of colour was provided by a yellow apple on a tall white pedestal, calling to mind the infamous medieval legend of William Tell — another fairly epic tale of fatherhood and target practice.

In an accompanying text, Si-Qin quotes from Brian Boyd's *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition and Fiction* (2009): 'In each new work [artists] will seek to raise the benefit — the attention-earning power — of their compositional efforts and lower their composition costs, through recombining existing solutions in new

ways, while also raising the benefits and lowering their audience's costs in time and effort.' An eminent Nabokov scholar, Boyd argues that art and fiction grew out of play, and significantly contributed to the survival and evolution of Homo sapiens communities by training their cognitive skills and bounding their identities. It's an ongoing contribution: to play implies being adaptive, learning how to deal with a given structure's arbitrary limits and sometimes transform it. Si-Qin's research, relatedly, moves within the boundaries of post-Internet art — i.e., art taking place after the introduction of the Internet, which means it doesn't only happen online or by digital means but that it uses as media all of the web's dynamics, such as social networking, interplay, the migration of information from one peer to another, DIY creativity (music, films, etc), the cracking of codes, etc.

Here Si-Qin seems at play with the field of relations and flux of communication generated by an art exhibition: he chooses what moves to assign to the players (artist, dealer) of this game and how to frame its narrative around a recurring fictional theme, capable of awakening the viewer's attention. Violence and romance always worked well, in this respect: 'Of loves and ladies, knights and arms, I sing,' as Ludovico Ariosto put it in the epic poem *Orlando Furioso* (1516).

Barbara Casavecchia

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REVIEW

Artforum
Timur Si-Qin

For *Mainstream*, Timur Si-Qin's first solo exhibition at Société, the artist lined the gallery's two rooms with thirty-two computer printout copies of posters for the movie *Transformers* (2007) and overlaid each with plant leaves of varying shapes, sizes, and species. In casual, asymmetric arrangements that do not necessarily respond to the composition of the posters, the botanical material serves a primarily symbolic function. Nature and culture, here framed in stark contrast to one another, nevertheless exist on the same plane. In fact, the logic of mechanical reproduction and the aesthetic of mass culture constitute our contemporary natural order. Si-Qin's art, in the free rein that it takes on culture, simultaneously embodies the act of consumption and the ethos and forms of digital media. Contemporary society's dissociation from a state of nature can be seen in the screen-tested aesthetic regime of *Transformers*, where lines deriving from American car production designate Optimus Prime as the kindred, benevolent protector, and organic design elements identify Megatron as an evil, foreign body threatening destruction. Occupying the center of the floor in each of the gallery's two rooms are arrangements of plants plucked from their pots with the dirt still attached, which evoke something between domesticated exoticism and the decor of a quasi-domestic space with exotic elements. In a broad-stroke gesture, a comically oversize blue carpet covers the gallery floor, transforming the atmosphere into that of a waiting room or clinic. The decoration highlights the harsh reality of the space: Since the opening, the plants have wilted, browned, even begun to rot. This ephemerality is not unrelated to the grotesquely short life cycle of consumer goods as well as the pitfalls of simplistic artistic gestures. But that's the world we live in, and, as we know all too well, there will be a new attraction "COMING SOON" — as the movie posters madly reiterate and Si-Qin's recent presentation blithely admits.

John Beeson

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