

Curatorial Portfolio

A selection of exhibitions, texts & Projects

Henrietta Y. Mansfeld (1989-)

Cao Yu: *Femme Fatale* Galerie Urs Meile, Lucerne, Switzerland

Galerie Urs Meile is pleased to present Cao Yu's *Femme Fatale*, the artist's second solo exhibition with the gallery and her first solo exhibition in Europe.

Cao Yu continues to expand her oeuvre by presenting a new series of photographic works entitled *Femme Fatale* (2019, c-print, 250 x 140 cm), which gave its title to the exhibition and is the artist's first attempt at photography. The experimental nature of Cao Yu's exhibitions stems from *I Have an Hourglass Waist* - the artist's first solo exhibition at the gallery's Beijing outpost. From video to sculpture, installation to work on canvas, and now photography, her multidisciplinary practice is crucial in challenging the perception of her surroundings, experiences and her role as an artist. Cao Yu's interpretation is jarring and contemplative for both a new and familiar audience.

The exhibition features three larger-than-life, full-length photographic portraits from the *Femme Fatale* series. The golden frames accentuate their grandiose in a style that resembles eighteenth-century Regence frames often used for portraits of the French monarchs. Instead, Cao Yu's subjects consist of ordinary, yet distinctive men of different classes caught in the action of urinating in public. Each man reveals his social class, be it the typical white-collar worker looking down at the ground, the slacker with flamboyant attire shouting and pointing at the passers-by or the corporate executive with his head held up high. None appears to shy away from the gaze of a stranger. Their exhibitionist behaviors match uncannily well with those of the French monarchs. In the work *Kneeling Figure* (2018, canvas, 134 x 84 x 12 cm), Cao Yu performs the act of kneeling - an ancient etiquette in the Chinese feudal system - on an empty canvas until the canvas is left with two concave voids. The viewers are absorbed by the traces of the artist's action and baffled as to what is the artist kneeling for and to whom? The *Femme Fatale* series and the *Kneeling Figure* reconsider the struggle of power dynamics through time on issues relating to class, gender and tradition.

The exhibition will also present a new sculpture work, *Yeah, I am Everywhere* (2019, green marble, cast copper with 24k gold-plating, 2 pieces; 20 x 62 x 42 cm, 54 x 70 x 40 cm), and two marble sculptures:

The World is Like This for Now II (2018, single long hair (the artist's own), marble, 2 pieces; 96 x 59 x 50 cm, 73 x 65 x 30 cm) and *90°C IV* (2019, marble, silk stocking, 56 x 46 x 36 cm). For the artist, stones like marble are usually perceived as lifeless, but she purposely inserts objects such as stockings and reproductions of human fingers to breathe life into these otherwise considered silent materials. They represent the 'pressure in life', states Cao Yu. For the new sculpture *Yeah, I am Everywhere*, the artist appropriates a set of green marbles whose color suggests the forthcoming spring. Rather than the wildflowers emerging from the greens of the blooming spring, Cao Yu implants ten copper-plated golden finger shapes - modeled after the artist's own fingers - onto the green marble. Just like the chaotic wildflowers, the golden fingers represent an infinite, vigorous growth that shines through despite constraints from the outside world, as if shouting "Yeah, I am Everywhere". The marble sculpture series comments on the omnipresent burden in life but provides a different way of understanding our surrounding.

Cao Yu's controversial video work *Fountain* - previously removed from her graduate show - will be presented with two video works titled *I Have* and *The Labourer*. The 11-minute-long video *Fountain* (2015, single channel HD video (colour, silent), 11'10") depicts the artist using her own body as a performative tool to carry out a long and exhausting process of squeezing breast milk until her breasts run dry. The title of the work is a response to the often-masculine association in art history made with works such as Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) and Bruce Nauman's *Self-Portrait as a Fountain* (1966-67). The work *I Have* (2017, single channel HD video (colour, sound), 4'22") consists in the artist narrating to the camera while boasting all the positive and envy-inducing traits she claims to have, with each sentence starting with: "I have..." *The Labourer* (2017, single channel HD video (colour, silent), 8'33") portrays the act of kneading dough. Instead of using hands and water, the video shows the artist repetitively mixing the flour with her feet and her own urine. *The Labourer* offers stark visual contrast to the *Femme Fatale* photography series but shares reciprocal nuances. The gender reversal psychology in Cao Yu's works is reminiscent of a 1906 silent comedy film *Les Résultats du Féminisme* (The Consequences of Feminism) by French female director Alice Guy, where gender roles have been inverted. It depicts men as child-carer in charge of the household while women drink at cafés while courting men. Cao Yu's autobiographical video works reflect on the notion of gender and social stereotypes.

The exhibition greets visitors with an interactive installation on the gallery door handle. The work titled *Perplexing Romance* consists of yellow Vaseline smeared all over the door handle, towards which each visitor is compelled and tempted but simultaneously irritated by the "perplex" welcome. As one enters, a member of the gallery staff will provide visitors with tissues with the artist's signature to rub their hands clean and then toss them away. Visitors are also encouraged to visit the gallery's washroom as they will encounter a sound installation titled *The Flesh Flavour* (2017, sound, 13'13"). Composed of a random assortment of bizarre noises that emits recognizable sounds of chewing, sexual intercourses or skin being whipped all originating from an unknown corner of the room, this sound installation baffles visitors with contempt. Back in the gallery space, visitors are bound to access the main gallery space by striding over an installation work titled *The Colourful Clouds* (2017, black bras, 10 x 300 x 345 cm), composed of a stack of black-colored bras placed on the gallery floor. Next to the installation is the work *The World Has Nothing to Do with Me II*, a site-specific installation consisting in a single hair of the artist's passing through two tiny holes carved into the gallery wall. The work often stands unnoticed, just like the opposing forces we encounter in life, which we often ignore as we tend to concentrate on our own personal narratives. The juxtaposition of these two installation works allows visitors to establish a personal connection with the artist's experience through activating their senses and perspectives.

Everything is Left Behind is another new series that will be present on this occasion. The three canvases (each 2018, canvas, fallen long hair (the artist's), 135 x 90 cm) with Chinese texts rendered using the artist's hair illustrate the stereotypical comments and opinions forced upon the artist at various stages of her life such as childhood, teenage years, motherhood and being a wife in China. As one steers their eyes towards the other side of the gallery wall, a set of eight canvases from the *canvas-series* (2018-2019, sign pen on canvas, each 75 x 75 x 15 cm) with vivid patches of hues brightens the space. Titled after their start and completion dates since 2012, it is one of the longest ongoing series of Cao Yu's oeuvre. According to the artist, it was the first time that she questioned herself about art. Cao Yu follows the threads on each canvas with sign pens as if aimlessly wandering in a foreign space. Whether in textual or in abstract forms, these canvases record the traces of Cao Yu's path as an artist. There is one prevailing question that the artist addresses to her audience: how can art make sense of our seemingly inconceivable society?

In the works of Cao Yu, one finds consistent opposing elements in each work, yet the artist seeks to address them through various lenses, may it be gender, class, ideology or time related issues. Her multi-disciplinary practice provides viewers with a myriad of visual narratives while delving into broader issues in society. Drawing from her own experience, Cao Yu's works reflect on the zeitgeist and attempts to define what it means to be a female, a Chinese and an artist in the current climate. As a female, she addresses issues on gender with the inclusion of the male narrative. As a Chinese, she draws on Chinese tradition and custom in an expansive and contemporary language. And as an artist, she continually challenges her artistic practice and confronts ideas on art, people and society. Her works are not opinionated. Instead, they allow viewers to form their interpretation under an organic process, either through direct physical interaction with a work or by being visually drawn to them. Viewers are invited to reconstitute the artist's experience through her works and reflect on her surroundings experience as an artist, a wife and a woman in today's society.

Cao Yu was born in Liaoning, China in 1988 and lives and works in Beijing. She received a BFA and MA in Sculpture from the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, China. Her recent major group exhibitions were held at Baxter Street at Camera Club, New York (2019), Museum of Applied Arts, Vienna (2019); Zhuzhong Art Museum, Beijing (2018); Martina Tauber Fine Art, Munich (2018); Beijing Minsheng Art Museum, Beijing (2018); Diskurs Berlin (2017); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2016). She was awarded Young Artist of the Year, 12th AAC Award of Art China (2018); Third Prize at Central Academy of Fine Arts Graduates Outstanding Exhibition, Beijing (2011). Her works are in the collection of M+ Collection, Hong Kong; Zhuzhong Art Museum, Beijing; Si Shang Art Museum, Beijing; Central Academy of Fine Arts Art Museum, Beijing.

Very special thanks to Samsung The Frame for the support of this exhibition.

Text by Henrietta Y. Mansfeld

Text has been published on: [Artforum](#), [Ocula](#), [Vision](#), [Artlinkart](#)



Image courtesy
Galerie Urs Meile and Cao Yu

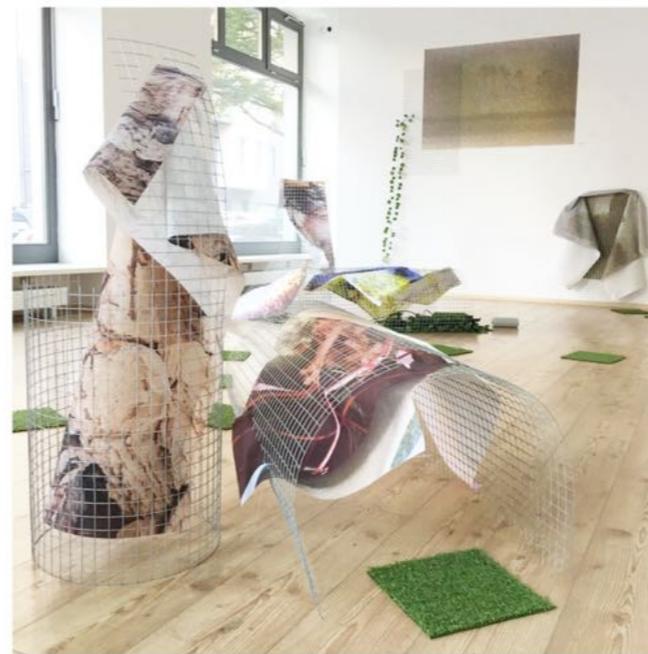
Li Linhui: X-PARK Prenzlauer Studio/Kunst Kollektiv, Berlin

Once serene,
the rivers of X-Park.
Once blossoming,
the flowers of X-Park.
Once pure,
the images of X-Park.

In the works of Linhui Li (1990-, Ürümqi), there is an ambience of nostalgia. It may be her use of film cameras or the process of how Li realises her photographs. *X-Park* is a series of performance-cum-photographic works that Li has developed in the public parks in Ürümqi, her childhood parks. Her photographic style shares lucid similarity with Poetic Realism. Inspired by French Impressionism, Poetic Realism movement -created by a group of French filmmakers in the 1930s- expresses the deep longing for an obsolete reality by recreating it in a lyrical style. However, the *accidental* performative feature in Li's work inadvertently reflects the controversial societal issues, allowing her work to morph into a type of post-Poetic Realism that documents societal issues.

The performers in Linhui Li's performance-cum-photography are security guards who *perform* their daily duties of scanning bags at the entry and exit of the public parks in Ürümqi. Each X-ray scan, hereby performance, disrupts Li's films; sometimes giving them extreme exposure, pixelation or blurring effects. The results are reminiscent of a Georges Seurat painting. The performance acts as an editing process, or perhaps an intervention for Li's photographs and the end-results are untamed. In the X Parks of Ürümqi, there is freedom to photograph, but there is also imprisonment of the pictures. Perhaps, one must be in a position of a "performer (authority)" to be *truly* free in an age of X Park.

Contaminated,
the rivers of X-Park.
Withered,
the flowers of X-Park.
Imprisoned,
the images in X-Park.



Martyna Poznańska: FOREST OF GESTURES*



My Body Is The Forest, The Forest Is My Body, 2017

Białowieża - Primeval Forest, Poland

2-channel video, each 10:53 min

camera, stills: Jacek Jaca Wiśniewsky

©Martyna Poznańska

*Curatorial text and proposal was shortlisted during the Second “Micro-Curatorial Project”, Frank F. Yang Art and Education Foundation, Hong Kong/Shanghai
Judging panel includes Karen Smith, Bao Dong, Liu Wei and Frank F. Yang

Link: <http://fyfoundation.com/news/20040>

The true nature of body is merely an ‘extension’ of space, proclaimed René Descartes in his *Principles of Philosophy*. Space, an abstract idea about a particular place that is both tangible and intangible, constructed and organic, stable and unstable; a place that remains inactive until bodies intervene. Flâneurs - bodies as wanderers in a given space- blindly follow constructions by practitioners who are guided by fictional knowledge, as though the whole process is built by obscurity. Such act choreographs bodies in space while *accidentally* merges bodies and space into one. Thus how can one assess the presence of flâneurs in a cultivated space like cities?

City is a constructed space in the natural environment. ‘Figures (flâneurs) are the acts of this stylistic metamorphosis of space,’ described by Michel de Certeau in his *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Flâneurs are not, in essence, move “freely” in space, but as dancers whose movements are determined by the choreographer. Each *dancer* produces a movement which contributes and reshapes the space. Their bodily gestures suggest their liberty and confinement in a given space. The bodies are confined when posited in a specific space. Borrowing from linguistics, adverbs such as *here* or *there*, posit bodies and in turn, restrict them to designated locations. The freedom of mobility grants bodies the ability to rewrite space, making *here* or *there*, and the space in *between*, either relevant or irrelevant. Constant movement is a prevalent feature of bodies in space. It also leaves traces and stores memories, adding metaphorical narratives to space. Buildings, parks and streets constructed and de-constructed, metaphors of space formed and abandoned, elements in space are in constant flux. The gesture of a wandering body -inclusive of all living organism- personify and activate space in ways that profound messages transmit beyond interpretation. Through the sound of the howling storm, chiming church-bells, and singing birds, bodies convey their habitat or *gestures* in space. Through what ways can such act be preserved and recalled?

Perhaps, sound emancipates memory of the transformation of bodies and space. It transmits, receives and deciphers such memories. Like flâneurs, memory acts as the metamorphosis of space. It is the ‘process of maintaining information over time’, according to Margaret W. Matlin. Sound evokes attention and memory -both consciously and unconsciously- and through this *attention*, bodies integrate into space and begin to identify and define particular content in space. The movement of sound determines gesture sensing and manipulates gestural movement in space. Sound, as bodies, incorporate spatial and aspatial properties. It represents the gestural movement in space that is both *liberated* and *confined*.

Berlin-based Polish artist Martyna Poznańska’s interdisciplinary practice incorporates sound, video, drawings and installation. The exhibition titled *Forest of Gestures* addresses different perception as to how we view bodies and space in a city like Shanghai.

Enikő Márton, Gerard Janssen, Judit Horváth Lóczi: *SHIFT*

Zönotéka, Berlin

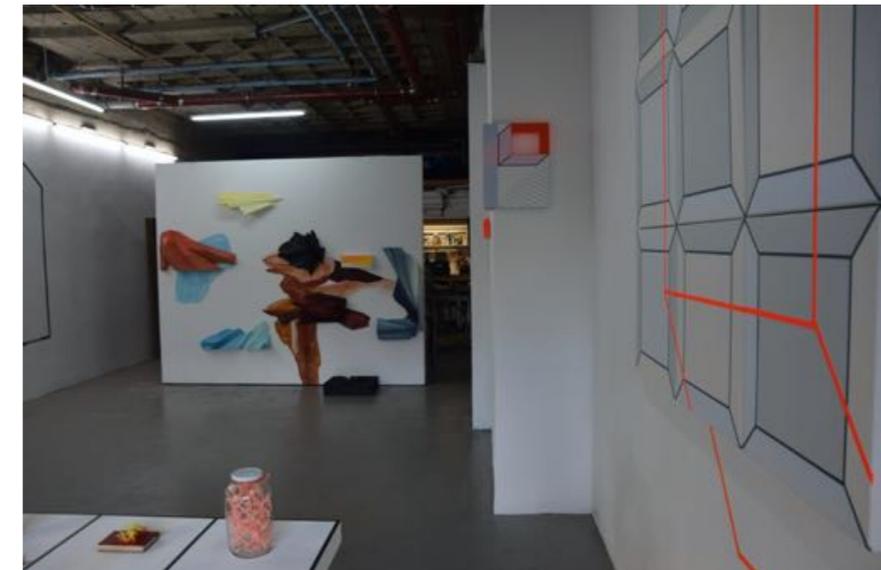
In music, shift represents a movement of the fingers on a string instrument, which changes the level in music. In language, a shift of words in a sentence might change it from a statement to a question. In time, a shift of the dial will affect the seconds of the day. Shift represents movement, each movement produces a new event and provides the basis for the next shift. In a space where there is a continuous movement, nothing remains constant. Therefore, what is it that contributes to the *shift*?

Forms and shapes construct the physical space. They may be organic and geometric. Organic often links with natural forms or asymmetric shapes with irregular lines. Geometric forms are often named shapes like circle or rectangle, to name a few. In visual art, there are naturalistic and realistic images. When an image is incomprehensible, they are named abstract images. In abstraction, if an image entails a recognisable object, it is an objective image, and a non-objective image is for those unrecognisable objects. Organic or geometric, naturalist or realistic, objective or non-objective, each depends on the other and does not always retain its form. Forms and shapes continuously collide and diffuse whenever they meet in a physical space. Interaction with one another constructs each one of them, forming new ones. How does interaction between forms and shapes correlate with us?

Aren't we, as humans also a part of and contribute to the constant shift in the physical space? Constructing relationship between objects is intrinsically humanistic as we constantly seek new definitions and interactions; to *shift* is to search for infinite possibilities. An object changes according to an interaction with an external force. The impact represents the reincarnation of the object itself. Societies exist in a physical space where constant shift between forms and shapes construct the tangibles. Artists investigate and visualise the possibilities that contribute to the construction and offer new definition for the understanding of the physical space.

The group exhibition *SHIFT* presents the possibilities of the act of shifting forms and shapes in a space, whether on a confined canvas or in the physical space of a gallery. *SHIFT* is pleased to invite three artists Enikő Márton (HU), Gerard Janssen (NL) and Judith Horváth Lóczi (HU) -all focus on the interaction between organic and geometric forms and shapes- by commissioning new works consisting of paintings, sculptures and installations. The exhibition will also present new collaborative works, accompanied by a dialogue text between the curator and the artists.

Curated & Text by Henrietta Y. Mansfeld



Tatiana Hahn: AS IF IT WERE REAL*



Same Place Another Time, 2017

Interactive installation, X-box kinetic technology
© Tatiana Hahn

*Curatorial text and proposal was drafted on the occasion of Spring/Break Art Show curatorial application

The exhibition *As If It Were Real* explores the notion of perception by questioning what you *think* you see and what you *actually* see. Through the lenses of Berlin-based photographer Tatiana Hahn, the exhibition presents an inflated version of our reality with an immersive and interactive installation that situates the viewers in a space where things appear real and familiar. According to the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, there is no pure actual object. Each *actual* is fabricated from a swarm of virtual images, something that is ephemeral, brief and unconscious. If Deleuze's claim proves true, then, how can one be certain of the things one sees? Is it, perhaps, what you think you see is what you actually see?

For the Spring/Break Art Show, artist Tatiana Hahn presents her two recent series titled *So Close So Far* and *Same Place Another Time*. The *So Close So Far* photography series features a collage of ambiguous imageries and happenings in the city of New York. It challenges the viewer's perception, memory and consciousness in ways that, what they *actually* see is a juxtaposition of fragmented and spontaneous moments captured and manipulated by the artist. The interactive installation titled *Same Place Another Time* allows participants to immerse themselves in a fragmented reality. The accelerated urban living facilitates the virtualisation of the actual by blurring the line between actual and virtual.

The theme *Fact and Fiction* confronts an increasingly intertwined contemporary reality. The exhibition *As If It Were Real* with photographer Tatiana Hahn attempts to make one question his or her surroundings. Choosing photography as the main medium, the exhibition also draws attention to the relationship between photography artists and their creations.

Text by Henrietta Y. Mansfeld

Li Linhui: LOOKING FOR VENUS
Kunsthau KuLe, Berlin

Venus, Aphrodite and Inanna are names given to represent the Goddess of beauty and love in Roman, Greek and Mesopotamian mythology respectively. Each narrative casts a new nuance. The original idea transforms itself into numerous forms and contents by its appropriators. From classical paintings to modern-day museum souvenirs, the meaning of the Goddess of Love and beauty is more abstract than ever. The products of such idea are so varied and disseminated that the original meaning might as well get lost in translation. Everyone possesses his interpretation of the so-called Venus.

The interpretation by the Ürümqi-born artist Linhui Li is engrossed in her interest in the in-betweens and the process of the formation of objects and events. For the exhibition *Looking for Venus*, Li commissions artisans from a few selected ateliers in Beijing to create a series of Venus dolls. The artist gives specific requirements for the *dolls* but does not interfere with the fabrication process. Working from secluded ateliers in Beijing with long hours and low wages while facing threats from immediate demolition, some of the commissioned craftsmen fathom who *venus* might be while others merely follow the requirements by Li. For many artists, the Goddess of Love and beauty has been a source of inspiration throughout art history. But what does the Goddess of Love and beauty or Venus mean to these atelier artisans?

In the exhibition *Looking for Venus*, artist Linhui Li questions the process of artmaking by contemporary artists. The Venus doll series addresses the connection between an idea and its product in Contemporary Art while exploring the value and the cost of originality. What does Venus represent now?

Curated & Text by Henrietta Y. Mansfeld



Josh Hadar: *BEYOND CONTEMPORARY ART*

Solo Exhibition at Beijing Oriental Poly Time Museum 北京时间博物馆, Beijing

The exhibition draws inspiration from the book titled *Beyond Contemporary Art*, written by Etan J. Ilfeld. It consists of works from over ninety artists from the past decade questioning whether if we have moved beyond Contemporary Art. Following the Industrial Revolution and rapid technology development, the omnipresent digitalisation in societal life have inspired a group of artists thinking beyond traditional medium and methods. Their works have shed light to a new breed of art form that blurs the line between art and design, aestheticism and functionality. It is an art form that transcends popular culture by bringing art closer to people than ever before.

In the early twentieth century, Italian Futurist art movement reshaped art forms. It celebrated advanced technology and modernity. The founding father Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, an Italian poet published "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism" on *Le Figaro* on February 20th, 1909. Futurism emphasised on youth, speed, power, technology and the industrial city. Now extinct, the Futurist movement gave rise to a new generation of artists and influenced art movements like Art Deco, Surrealism, Dadaism, Neo-Futurism and other major art movements of the twentieth century.

A new group of creative collectives ranging from artists, architects, designers named themselves Neo-Futurists. While preserving the legacy of the now-extinct Futurist art movement, the Neo-Futurists believe in "cities releasing emotions, driven by eco-sustainability, ethical values and implementing new materials and new technologies to provide a better quality of life for its city-dwellers", according to Christian Narkiewicz-Laine, the Founding President of the Chicago Athenaeum Museum of Architecture and Design. Renowned Neo-Futurists include thought leader Hal Foster, architect Zaha Hadid, British artist Olivia Peake, to name a few.

Neo-Futurist sculptor Josh Hadar creates a series of solar-powered sculptures which investigates the relationship between art, technology and environment. For more than a decade of experimentation, Hadar's sculptures challenge the boundary between art and technology and its impact on the environment. His solar-powered sculptures aim to evoke thoughts on urban re-intervention by combining art and technology.

The project seeks to contextualise contemporary art in a society that has a growing obsession on technology. How does art become an integral part of the society? More importantly, how art and technology can shape the art of today and how the 'new art (Neo-Futurism)' can transform our society? Josh Hadar: Contemporary Art brings the American Neo-Futurist artist Josh Hadar to China with a series of projects including a solo exhibition in Beijing, an artist dialogue in Shanghai and an artist residency program and workshop in Dali, Yunnan.

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