

SYMPOSIUM

Cohabitation – Worlding the Sinophonecene and Planetary Aesthetics in Contemporary Art

2nd International Gathering of the
Research Network for Modern and Contemporary Chinese Art (ReNetMoCoCA)



Zheng Bo, "You are the 0.01%", installation view at Oi Art Centre Hong Kong, 2021, courtesy of the artist

Date: June 3rd, 2023

Venue: Online (Zoom) hosted by Heidelberg Centre for Transcultural Studies

Host and Chair: Franziska Koch (Heinrich-Heine Universität Düsseldorf)

Organizing Team: Cila Brosius (independent curator), Nora Wölfing (Freie Universität Berlin),
Xuan Ma (Utrecht University)

CONCEPT

The Hong Kong based artist Zheng Bo uses the phrase “You are the 0,01%” to highlight the infinitesimal role that humans play in the planet’s biomass. Using grass as an organic medium, he creates a living sculpture of the shockingly small number that stands in complete disproportion to the disastrous impact humans have had on Earth. Zheng is one among a growing number of artists in the Sinophone world, who investigate different forms of **cohabitation** and interspecies relationships, prompting viewers to consider what **planetary thinking** means in relation to being **locally situated**.

Following these artists’ lead, the symposium “Cohabitation – Worlding Concepts of the Sinophonocene and Planetary Aesthetics in Contemporary Art” will explore the particularities of planetary aesthetics within the Chinese context—a region that, after historically suffering from the consequences of modern anthropocentrism and mass industrialization, has recently developed into the key driving force of global capitalism and extractivism. It is also a region that is intrinsically linked to traumatic experiences of imperialism and colonialism, followed by other authoritarian regimes, which effectively up-rooted earlier cosmological understandings and aesthetic negotiations of man’s (minor) place in the world. Therefore, despite an increasingly shared awareness, the growing environmental concerns expressed in artistic practices from the 1970s and onwards in Europe and North-America have reached the Sinophone world differently.

Since the 1970s, human-made catastrophes such as nuclear melt-downs, deforestation, sea pollution, and consequences of global warming have repeatedly driven people into the streets and urged artists to take action around the globe. The natural sciences have prominently responded with a growing cross-disciplinary discourse crystallizing around the concept of the **Anthropocene** (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000) that provoked a range of alternative concepts in the humanities such as **Capitalocene** (Malm 2016; Ruccio 2011, Haraway 2016) and **Chtulucene** (Haraway 2016). The latter critically acknowledge the global crisis caused by anthropocentrism, but seek notions of the world that allow for a more relational and a less human-centered worldview. Post-modernist and post-colonial discussions in the field of art history have been particularly informed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s book *Death of a Discipline* (2003) proposing a planetary frame to reconsider natural spaces as intrinsically related with us and inhabited by powerful non-human agents, who counteract the hierarchical political and human-centered spaces defined by globalization.

The discussion has grown to include literature, visual arts, and cultural studies that explore the idea of planetary aesthetics (Elias and Moraru 2015; Ballard 2021) and propose an alternative “worlding” through art (Pheng Cheah 2008; Kaiser 2014; Peeren 2022; also compare the project “Worlding Public Cultures,” 2020-23). It asks to unlearn the hegemonic and violent modern episteme that revolves around the dichotomy between nature and Man with a capital “M”, conceiving of himself as the (white, male) master of the universe (Sylvia Winter 2003). More recently, and in productive tension with it, the concept of the **Sinophonocene** has been introduced, highlighting the considerable environmental impact of the greater Chinese region as one of the most densely populated areas on the planet (Hai 2022).

Our symposium builds on these suggestions by querying the fundamental observation of “the planetary as a post-anthropocentric framework [that] shows artistic engagements of environmental issues as both locally grounded and simultaneously planetary” (Hai et al. 2022, 25). We will focus on **artistic practices regarding cohabitation as a spatially defined as well as an inter-species related response** to this challenge.

What resonates differently with the aforementioned concepts is the question of **how we can inhabit the planet with other species in a conscious manner**. This question allows us to tease out local cultural, (art) historical, biological, cosmological, and aesthetic aspects of the planet and planetary practice in order to further challenge the notion of the Anthropocene.

The symposium presents **case study-based presentations** that respond to one or more of the following questions:

- How does art from the Sinophone region negotiate the planetary complex and respond to the climate breakdown, capitalist extractivism, and environmental destruction?
- What kind and how does art envision, enable, or even perform ideas and practices of cohabitation?
- Are there culturally or historically specific ways of imagining interspecies relationships, non-human centered cosmologies, and modes of cohabitation?
- Is a term like “Sinophonecene” opening a new chapter of planetary discussion? Or does it inverse the cultural essentialist, nationalist, and human-centered thought of a “Chinese way” that contradicts a relational positionality?

The symposium constitutes the second international gathering of the **Research Network for Modern and Contemporary Chinese Art** and hopes to institutionalize the format on a geographically rotating, annual, (hybrid) basis, invigorating the network that was founded in 2015. The informal, grass-root based association welcomes new members free of charge. To apply for membership, please send a letter of motivation that outlines your academic focus or other engagement related with modern/contemporary art of the Sinophone world and its diasporas.

The network also greatly appreciates receiving calls for papers, announcements of scholarly/exhibition activities, announcement of member publications and their reviews, as well as job opportunities to publish on the network’s blog: [Network for Modern and Contemporary Chinese Art – ReNetMoCoCA \(hypotheses.org\)](http://Network for Modern and Contemporary Chinese Art – ReNetMoCoCA (hypotheses.org)).

PROGRAM

June 3rd, 2023

Panels	Time (CET) Please be sure to convert the below into your timezone	Presentation	Speaker(s)
Welcome	9:00 - 9:05	Welcome note	Franziska Koch
	9:05 - 9:10	Outline of the program	Nora Wölfing
Keynote	9:10 - 9:55	Keynote	Hai Ren
	9:55 - 10:10	Q&A	
	10:10 - 10:20	Short break	
Panel 1	10:20 - 10:22	Introduction of the first panel and Suk Man Yip	Franziska Koch
	10:22 - 10:44	<i>Frogtopia: The Embodiment of Taoism and Zen Buddhism in Frog King Kwok Mang Ho's Art Performance (2011-2022)</i>	Suk Man Yip
	10:44 - 10:45	Introduction of Antonie Angerer and Anna-Viktoria Eschbach	Franziska Koch
	10:45 - 11:05	<i>The Stages and Performances of China's urbanization: An analysis of the urban as a stage of political and economic power and its impact on the urban bodies</i>	Antonie Angerer & Anna-Viktoria Eschbach (joint presentation)
	11:05 - 11:25	Discussion	
	11:25 - 11:35	Short break	
Panel 2	11:35 - 11:37	Introduction of second panel and Mia Yu	Cila Brosius
	11:37 - 11:57	<i>Drone as an Affective Storyteller: Liu Yujia's Eco-Fiction</i>	Mia Yu
	11:57 - 11:58	Introduction of Liu Mankun	Cila Brosius
	11:58 - 12:18	<i>Habitability as Praxes: the Cultivation of Nomadic Spacetime in Performance and Moving Image Art from the Sinophone Grasslands</i>	Liu Mankun
	12:18 - 12:38	Discussion	

	12:38 - 13:38	Long break	
Panel 3	13:38 - 13:40	Introduction of third panel and Isabelle Demin	Xuan Ma
	13:40 - 14:00	<i>Changing the Terms of Encounter." On Human-Plant-Relations in Zheng Bo's Pteridophilia 1-4 (2016-2020</i>	Isabelle Demin
	14:00 - 14:01	Introduction of third panel and Xiaofan Wu	Xuan Ma
	14:01 - 14:21	<i>Tong Wenmin: A Walking Forest</i>	Xiaofan Wu
	14:21 - 14:41	Discussion	
	14:41 - 14:46	Short break	
Panel 4	14:46 - 14:48	Introduction of fourth panel and Christopher Chan	Cila Brosius
	14:48 - 15:08	<i>Between Climate and Culture: Politics and Poetics of Contemporary Art-making at China's Pelagic Periphery</i>	Christopher Chan
	15:08 - 15:10	Introduction of Bettina Freimann	Cila Brosius
	15:10 - 15:30	<i>CLEAR RIVER, CALM SEA 河清海宴</i>	Bettina Freimann
	15:30 - 15:50	Discussion	
Conclusion	15:50 - 16:15	Wrap-up Discussion and closing remarks	Franziska Koch, Hai Ren, and Wenny Teo, moderated by Nora Wölfing

PAPER ABSTRACTS and SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Keynote Speaker: Hai Ren (任海), Professor of More-than-Asian Studies

Hai Ren is Professor of East Asian Studies and Anthropology, and affiliated faculty in Gender and Women's Studies, and Social, Cultural & Critical Theory at the **University of Arizona**. He is also Bayu Scholar Distinguished Professor in the Department of Sculpture at Sichuan Fine Arts Institution in Chongqing, a top-ranking sculpture program in China. He received his BA in History and Archeology from Sichuan University in Chengdu, China, and an MA in Museum Studies and a Ph.D. in Sociocultural Anthropology from the University of Washington in Seattle. His current teaching and research interests include research-oriented art, public culture, new materialism, environmental humanities, comparative media and technology studies, urban studies, critical theory, and political philosophy. His interdisciplinary publications include studies of socially engaged art, research-oriented art, public history, new materialist anthropology, urban studies, comparative media and technology, popular culture, and critical theory. They reflect Professor Ren's commitment to more-than-Asian studies. His recent work has appeared in *Verge: Studies in Global Asias*, *Screen Bodies*, *The Art Newspaper China*, *Mediapolis*, *Journal of Urban Affairs*, *Journal of Korean and Asian Arts*, *China Review International*, and *Pacific Affairs*. His forthcoming book focuses on research-oriented art and generative aesthetics in Sinophone Asia.

Panel Discussant: Dr Wenny Teo, Senior Lecturer in Modern and Contemporary Art

Wenny Teo is a specialist in modern and contemporary art, with a particular emphasis on China and Chinese diasporas in transnational and global contexts at **The Courtauld Institute of Art**. Prior to joining the Courtauld in 2012, she was a curator at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Shanghai, and assistant curator at Tate Modern, and continues to work on various curatorial projects internationally. Her writing has been published in numerous academic journals, exhibition catalogs and art magazines, and she serves on several editorial boards, including *Oxford Art Journal*, for which she is also Book Reviews Editor (post-1800s).

She is currently preparing two scholarly monographs for publication. *One World, One Dream: Contemporary Chinese Art and Global Politics* (2008-2022), examines critical artistic responses to the State's political ideology of national rejuvenation (the 'Chinese Dream' 中国梦) and its increasing dominance in global affairs, focusing on intermedial and digital practices by the new generation of Chinese artists born in the 1980s and 1990s whose work center on a range of thematic concerns; such as the politics of infrastructure, surveillance, migrancies of labor, class, ethno-nationalism, ecology and epidemiology.

Wenny received a Paul Mellon Mid-career Fellowship in 2020 for her second book project, *Kim Lim: Forms of Resistance and Relief*, which will be the first scholarly monograph on the late Singapore-born British sculptor and print-maker Kim Lim (1936-1997). The book project will examine the breadth of Lim's artistic output across different media, shedding light on the work of an artist whose multifaceted, transcultural practice necessarily complicates and challenges established narratives of post-war art in Britain.

Between Climate and Culture: Politics and Poetics of Contemporary Art-making at China's Pelagic Periphery

By Christopher Chan

“Russland ist der Sturm, China ist der Klimawandel. Und insofern werden wir uns für diesen Klimawandel in den kommenden Jahren wappnen müssen.”

“Russia is the storm, China is climate change”, Thomas Haldenwang, the German Intelligence Chief declared ominously in 2022, “So we are going to have to brace for this climate change in the coming years.” If climate change indeed takes on a doubled valence today as the “meteoric and meteorological ascent of China” (Zee 2021), it is most felt at China’s political and geographical edge. As the nations of the world each try to navigate the changing environment on both a planetary and political front, this paper examines how environment, politics, and history of its pelagic borders become imbricated through the work of art that both constructs and contends with social imaginations of ecological and geopolitical futures.

Focusing on the production of recent contemporary art exhibitions on the Matsu Islands, a set of militarized islands controlled by Taiwan off the coast of the Chinese mainland, this research explores how itinerant artists at the peripheries must contend with an aesthetic of a local island ecology (over 200 km away from the main island of Taiwan with different dialects, histories, flora and fauna) that simultaneously has implications for the island nation’s own geopolitical future. In this study, the politically fraught sea border in the Taiwan Strait becomes the site upon which art and politics are mediated through environmental aesthetics, and where the celebration of a species of marine zooplankton (*Noctiluca scintillans*) dominates both the island’s prospects for an eco-tourism economy as well as the aesthetic of a new contemporary arts biennial.

Cohabitation thus becomes not only an ecological matter of inter-species relations, but one that involves a political matter of living with one’s enemy neighbor peacefully. Moreover, the aesthetic production of site-specific art on the part of the artists must at once address on a local level the logics of nonhuman environmental agents, but also at a trans-local and geopolitical level the dehumanizing “ontology of the enemy” (Galison 1994). That is to say, for the archipelagic islands on the frontlines like Matsu, cohabitating in the world is a matter of coming to terms with the “with-world” or *Mitwelt* (Heidegger 1962) that is the doubled crisis of an island nation’s precarious existence both subject to environmental factors as well as the politics of living next to China.

This paper speaks to how the environment itself becomes proxy for an anthropological understanding of the world and situates the socially-engaged artist-as-ethnographer (Foster 1995) as the new subject of power and possibility within the strategic production of site-specific public art that operate with the new logics of a contemporary existential struggle: one that is simultaneously political, existential, and ecological. In this case study, cohabitation is imbricated with implications of geopolitics, temporalities of its Cold War past and the prospects of future war, and the question of how do we live together or in Latour’s words, “Où Atterrir?” (2018) becomes mixed with the echoes of my island-based artist interlocutors: “How can we live next to each other? And where do we go from here?”

—**Christopher Chan** is an Anthropology PhD candidate at the University of California, Berkeley and current Fulbright-Hays DDRA Fellow based at Academia Sinica, Taiwan. His research involves imaginations of sovereignty as it is (re)mediated through making art and remaking environments. Through a multi-sited ethnography across various field sites off the coast of China, his research follows a series of seafaring artists who are involved in site-specific work on border islands situated at China’s pelagic peripheries and examines how their mobility and mobilization by the state make manifest a greater concern with living-with or contending with future crisis. The role that artists and the environment play together in crafting culture in crisis becomes a lens through which the contemporary problem of China (as both a real entity in the world as well as a real notion that inflects

how we live in and see the world) can be studied as an anthropological question. His research has also been the recipient of the Social Science Research Council International Research Fellowship as well as the Wenner-Gren Dissertation Fieldwork Grant.

CLEAR RIVER, CALM SEA 河清海宴 - a group exhibition in the frame of CHINA TIME 2022

www.clearrivercalmsea.com

with artists Li Binyuan, Ma Haijiao, Tong Wenmin, Xin Liu, Yao Qingmei, Yi Dai, Jessica Broscheit, Corrina Goutos, Swaantje Güntzel, Kathrin Bethge and Robin Hinsch

By Bettina Freimann

The scope of the climate crisis as a global issue is difficult to comprehend. Although the effects are felt right at our own doorstep, the consequences of global warming and species extinction remain beyond imagination for many. The connection between one's own consumption decision, production and supply chains, CO2 emissions and the resulting consequences for the environment seems abstract. The time lag between cause and effect leads to the assumption that individual behavior has no impact on the planet's future.

At the same time, in the West as well as in China, the human relationship to nature has fundamentally changed since the beginning of industrialization. While the Taoists in ancient China spoke of a harmonious unity between man and nature, and Goethe in the late 18th century of reverence for the same, the view of the natural environment has evolved into a resource-oriented subject-object relationship as a result of urbanization, turbo-cultivation of land and globalization. The feeling for nature has been lost.

The group exhibition Clear River, Calm Sea 河清海宴 explores the relationship between the individual, nature, and society against the backdrop of the global climate crisis in the age of the Anthropocene. How can humans, caught between a longing return to nature and the realization of the devastating state of the environment, redefine their role as part of the natural order? By using multi-sensory activation through sound and video installation, photography, painting, and sculpture, a poetic narrative emerges that creates an emotional connection to the individual experience of nature.

—**Bettina Freimann** is an independent curator and sinologist based in Hamburg, Germany. From 2016- 2021 she was co-curating the independent Artspace Âme Nue together with Liberty Adrien, where they presented local and international artists in various solo and group shows, organized the talk series Entering the Anthropocene with Fritz Habekuss (Die ZEIT), the art book market STAPLED and the exhibition format One Weekend Only to promote young artists in Hamburg. She co-curated Lu Yang, Electromagnetic Brainology, 2018; the online and window exhibition 世外桃源 The Peach Spring Beyond This World with aaajiao and Ye Funa in 2021; Moshtari Hilal, The warm pillow was my mother. The blanket my father., 2019; Parisa Azadi, Ordinary Grief, in cooperation with Galerie Melike Bilir, 2022; Isaac Chong Wai, BEYOND, Performance in front of Kunsthalle Hamburg, 2022 as well as the group shows Animal Kingdom, 2021; and Goddesses of Healing, in cooperation with M.Bassy e.V. 2021 among others. Since the closing of the space in 2021, she is working as an independent curator in Hamburg and realized the solo exhibition of Claudius Schulze Traces of Fragility in the frame of 8th Triennial of Photography Hamburg and the group show Clear River, Calm Sea in the frame of CHINA TIME 2022.

[Instagram](#)

Drone as an Affective Storyteller: Liu Yujia's Eco-Fiction

By Mia Yu

My presentation focuses on Liu Yujia's upcoming solo exhibition *The Darkness Shimmers in the Light*, which is due to open on June 22, 2023 at Tang Contemporary Art in Beijing. As the exhibition curator, I have been deeply involved in the yearlong research, filming and production of the eponymous film featured in the exhibition, which centers on the eco-system of the Sungari River and the Changbai Mountains. The film attempts to approach ecology as an intrinsic framework of all encounters, and means of shared subjectivity between human and nonhuman beings. This paper traces various challenges that we encountered when filming the project in January 2023. The extremely cold and icy environment made huge impacts on our physical and mental state and especially the functioning of our drone camera. The challenging experience eventually turned into a source of artistic and curatorial inspiration. Using drone as a key narrative agent, Liu Yujia's docu-fictional film questions the division of the nation-states and debunks the binary of nature and culture. Ultimately, the film integrates drone images into embodied and affective ecology. Respectively from artistic and curatorial standpoints, Liu Yujia and myself explore eco-fiction as an experimental method that preserves emotive forms of kinship with more-than-humans.

—**Mia Yu** is a Beijing-based, globally active art historian and curator. Her research interests include Asian geopolitics, energy politics and the Anthropocene from the perspective of Northeast China. Her recent exhibitions and projects include "Ecological Entanglements From Northeast China", "Three Contested Sites—The Worldly Fables of the Long 1990s", "Resonances of One Hundred Things" (OCAT Biennale 2021), "From Vladivostok to Xishuangbanna" (Jimei x Arles International Photo Festival 2020), and "Photoethics: CHINAFRICA" (2020). Mia Yu was the winner of the Yishu Award for Critical Writing on Contemporary Art in 2018, the recipient of the Tate Asia Research Travel Fellowship in 2017 and the winner of the CCAA Art Critic Award in 2015. She was nominated for the Curator of the Year Award for the 14th AAC Art Awards. Mia Yu's research essays appeared at books such as *Uncooperative Contemporaries: Art Exhibitions in Shanghai* in 2000. Her video essays have been exhibited at Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Times Art Center Berlin, Times Museum, Villa Vassiliev and Asia Society Hong Kong. Since 2021, Mia Yu initiated a long-term curatorial project "The Post-Anthropocene North: Resource Frontiers" that is focused on ecological entanglements and sensibilities from the perspective of Northeast Asia.

Habitability as Praxes: the Cultivation of Nomadic Spacetime in Performance and Moving Image Art from the Sinophone Grasslands

By Liu Mankun

Envisioning co-habitation begs the question of what it means to live and what the parameters of habitability are. In astrobiology and geoscience, habitability is identified with the minimum physiochemical conditions required for at least one organism to sustain and replicate, often measured on a planet scale (Cockell et al. 2016; Seager 2013). This dominant interpretation of habitability as universally objective and given, however, impoverishes and isolates life for the blueprint of space colonization. Such problematics arguably hinder our current planetary thinking, which undertakes habitability as a primary concern (Chakrabarty 2019, 20).

Spivak's planetarity, however, was originally phrased as "the whole range of human universals: aboriginal animism as well as the spectral white mythology of postrational science" (2015, 292).

Planetary as such denotes plural onto-epistemological-cum-material worlds rather than a planet. This implies that the planetary Chakrabarty (2019, 17) associates with the rise of Earth System Science and Cold War space technologies is but one of many planetary schemata. However, not all the planetaries are traceable through technological and material histories as planetarity tends to evade ontological experiences (DeLoughrey 2019, 65–66). This is where art serves as a vantage point of observation by bringing the invisible into perceptibility.

On this basis, this paper proposes that the urgent task for planetary thinking is to pursue habitability as not geophysically given but historically cultivated, communally inherited, intersubjectively perceived, and geospatially bounded through praxes. It invokes the Sinophone framework to bring geopolitical margins, where such praxes are endangered, into light. In particular, it explores the generation of nomadic spacetime as a praxis of habitability within and beyond Inner Mongolia grasslands through a range of in-situ artworks from the program “Go Nomadic Together.”

Initiated by artist Chyanga in 2020, the program carries a twofold imperative. Socio-environmentally, it attends to the sustainment of nomadism, both as the practice of rotational grazing and a traditional lifeway, in the face of state-led territorialization and green policies. Cultural-politically, it calls for multivocal artistic selfhoods from the Sinophone’s northern frontier. Spanning multiple ethnic contexts, the program ferments a common ecocultural identity based on an affinity with grasslands, thereby surpassing anthropocentric and ethnocentric politics.

Without prior arrangements, works in the program are characterized by a shared interest in unsettling spatiotemporal perceptions on the grassland through bodily movements, actions, and sound interventions. This strategy can be summarized as sculpting nomadic spacetime through time-based media, which this paper suggests as emblematic of the everyday cultivation of habitability on grasslands. By examining the peculiar spatialities and temporalities that emerge through the works, this article reads habitability into dimensions including but unlimited to the following:

- Mobility
- Synchronicity among different life circles
- Navigability and sensorial affordance of the environment
- Sustainability and inheritability of more-than-human kinship
- Congruency between cosmological knowing and ethical doing.

Meanwhile, by tracing the artists’ performative lexicon to mundane and ritualist activities on the grassland, the paper asks how co-habitation is sustained among nomadic communities. Overall, the case study explores planetary aesthetics as an embodied way of knowing unoffered by narrative-based or analytical didactics.

—**Liu Mankun** is an author of contemporary art history and criticism based in Hong Kong. Her current PhD research at the School of Creative Media, City University of Hong Kong, looks into the intersection of contemporary art, ecology, and Indigeneities in East and Southeast Asia. The research explores issues including the transaction between mediumship and creative media, mythologies and cosmologies, queer and Indigenous futurism, as well as aesthetics and ethics as political loci. Her broader research interest includes socially/ecologically engaged art, more-than-human sociality, and visual/media culture in the Anthropocene.

Liu holds a B.A. in Fine Arts from the Chinese University of Hong Kong and an M.Phil. in Visual Arts from Hong Kong Baptist University. She has co-organized and presented at multiple conferences including “[Eco-mediating Indigeneities: Arts, Spiritual Practices, and Community Resilience in the Anthropocene Asia](#)” at ASLE 2023, “[Art and Critical Ecologies: Multiscalar Engagements](#),” “[The 2nd International Environmental Humanities Conference](#),” and “[Socially Engaged Art in Post-Colonial Hong Kong and Southeast Asia](#).” Her media articles are seen in *Artlink*, *LEAP*, *Ocula*, *TANC*, and *Art Basel Stories*. She is a member of [Wanwu Practice Group](#).

Tong Wenmin: A Walking Forest

By Xiaofan Wu

This paper considers the relationship between human beings and the natural world in the practice of Chongqing based artist Tong Wenmin (b. 1989). The artist's observations during her Ruins Project (2020-2021) of how quickly weeds started to grow out of crevices and "take over" concrete ruins—traces of China's rapid urbanization—served as Tong's starting point to explore issues around co-habitation.

For almost ten years, Tong has been using her body as an interface to explore her relationship with nature. For her ongoing series of performance projects "From South to North" (2022-present), Tong has been imprinting her entire body with various plants that she had collected in different regions of China over a period of one year, and then pressed and prepared as botanical specimens. The imprinting process started with the careful placement of the prepared plant samples on her naked body, and was followed by exposing herself repeatedly to the sun for a period of 2 months, 5 hours per day. Eventually, the plants became pale silhouettes on her skin, transforming Tong into a "walking forest" as she calls it.

The artwork *Archive of Botanical Specimens* (2022) shows arrangements of the "botanical tattoos" in the shape of the artist's front and back body on paper. Without overlapping one another, the plants are spread out evenly in an almost ornamental fashion.

Employing her plant body, Tong created a series of body-centered performances in which she explores the relationship between human and nature. In her performance-based video, such as *Flickering* (2022), she ties her imprinted body to a tree, both hanging upside down from the crawler of a mobile crane, flickering the ground. In another performance-based video, *Strangle* (2022), Tong wrestles with another person whose body is not imprinted in the grass, which I suggest to read as a comment on how nature and humans are contending with each other.

This paper focuses on the aesthetic and meaning-making mode of imprinting, a time-based process involving physical contact. The paper is specifically interested in exploring how the artwork reflects on the interaction of natural forces and artistic/human agency. On the one hand, Tong controls which plants and how they are transferred onto her body. On the other hand, she is subject to the natural forces of the weather.

Based on close readings of the artworks, writings about the artworks, a conversation with the artist and socio-political contextualizations this paper suggests to read the artist's transformation into a "walking forest" as a critical engagement with co-habitation from a specific locale.

—**Xiaofan Wu** is a PhD student in Cultural Mediations at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada. She graduated with a BA in Art History from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and an MA in Art History from the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University. She specializes in contemporary Chinese art from the 90s to the present and her research interests include new media, performance art, and exhibition history.

"Changing the Terms of Encounter." On Human-Plant-Relations in Zheng Bo's Pteridophilia 1-4 (2016-2020)

By Isabelle Demin

In light of the current climate crisis, we as humans are forced to think about an alternative relationship with the planet. Centuries of resource depletion, pollution, and species extinction threaten the existence of all life on Earth - human and non-human. While solutions are being discussed from a variety of scientific, political, and creative perspectives, decades of passivity have revealed not only a political crisis, but also a spiritual crisis of dissociation between humans and nature.

Artist Zheng Bo (b. 1974, Beijing) cites classical Chinese philosophy as a possible way to rethink the encounter between humans and plants. He refers to his art as "Multi-Species Vibrancy," working with both people and plants. Part of his practice is the video series *Pteridophilia* (2016-ongoing), which translates as Love of Ferns. In these eco-queer films, as Zheng Bo describes them, he shows intimate encounters between young men and ferns, in a jungle in Taiwan. Shifting between sensuality and provocation, the films challenge notions of dominance and blur the lines between species. References for the approach to *Pteridophilia* include North American theorists such as Timothy Morton, Donna Haraway, Natasha Myers as well as the central texts of Daoism, such as *Daodejing* in English translation. This combination thereby reflects Zheng Bo's own engagement with ecological issues.

The analysis examines the complexity of *Pteridophilia* 1-4 (2016-2019) from four perspectives, considering temporality, place, narratives, and bodily representations of people and plants. In many ways, the series suggests a new unity between humans and nature, not only through the physical act of being together, such as sex and eating, but also through a strong visual aesthetic that allows humans to merge with nature on an intuitive and sensual level. In *Pteridophilia*, Zheng Bo uses sex as a stage to address the distance between humans and plants. The categories of what is considered natural and unnatural as well as the physical boundaries between humans and plants are questioned. Zheng Bo develops a complex representation of the multiple relationships between humans and plants, which constantly fluctuate between the attributions of individual / collective and partner / victim. These different descriptions do not contradict each other, but point to the complexity of the relationships between humans and plants in times of acute ecological crisis.

—**Isabelle Demin** holds a BA in Cultural Studies and an MA in Art History from Technical University Berlin, Germany and University of California, Los Angeles. With a focus on contemporary art, her research is particularly interested in practices engaging with the more than human world, geological time and the environment. Within this realm, video works, though often embedded in a multidisciplinary practice, are central to her research.

Frogtopia: The Embodiment of Taoism and Zen Buddhism in Frog King Kwok Mang Ho's Art Performance (2011-2022)

By Suk Man Yip

It is a study about the concept of Frogtopia 蛙托邦 initiated by the Hong Kong performance artist Kwok Mang-ho 郭孟浩,¹ aka "Frog King" 蛙王, and its relationship with Zen Buddhism, Taoism and the environment. It also studies the messages of cohabitation and an all-thing-equal cosmology in the performances and the influence on the Sinophone regions.

Frogtopia, an imaginary world created by Kwok Mang-ho, is a combination of "frog" and "Utopia" and refers to a Datong World 大同世界 in which all sorts of living things, including frogs and human

¹ Kwok Mang Ho, born in 1947 in Guangzhou and grew up in Hong Kong, experienced Art life in New York for 15 years, returned and settled down in Hong Kong since 1995. "Time as Art" and "Art as Play", two essential ideas of his art creation, reflect on his art performances. He particularly emphasizes audience interaction, participation and improvisation. Refer to: http://www.frogkingkwok.com/aboutfk_profile.html.

beings, live together happily. As Kwok calls himself “Frog King” and has been adopting a smiling frog as his icon since the 1970s, it is understandable why the artist named his imaginary kingdom after the word “frog”. He first used “Frogtopia” to name his exhibition, “Frogtopia Hongkongnucopia” 蛙托邦：鴻港浩搞筆, at the 54th Venice Biennale in 2011² and keeps using the name in his following performances and artworks, for example, “The Arch of Frogtopia” 蛙托邦拱門 (2016).³ However, the most inspiring and significant piece(s) should be his art performances as the Frog King of the Frogtopia, which he has been continuing for more than ten years. In one of his performances in 2021, he wore the costume of the Frog King with a pair of froggy glasses, a hat and a black and white cloak studded with small round stones, carrying a bamboo brush and two silver gourds.⁴ He first spread ink on the ground full of sand and stones and then threw a pile of white papers to the sky with the audiences. After the ground was covered with white papers, he turned on the water pipe, letting water mix with the ink on the papers. Finally, he burnt all papers to ash with a fire gun. Like a ritual, he, the Frog King of Frogtopia, returned to the forest and rested with his little frogs after everything became silent. The performance not only showed the link with the Five Elements from Taoism: Metal (silver gourds), Wood (bamboo brush and papers), Water (water and ink), Fire (fire gun), and Earth (stones on his cloak and the ground); but also implied the cycle from birth to death in Buddhism.

Moreover, many intriguing things are worth investigating. For example, why did he use ink and water in the performance? Was it related to traditional Chinese paintings and Zen Paintings advocated by his teacher and the Father of Contemporary Chinese Ink Art, Lui Shou-kwan 呂壽琨? Did the part of Frog King returning to the forest imply it was time for human beings to return to nature? What were the differences in the audience’s reactions when his performance showed in different venues and cities in the Sinophone regions?

The paper analyses the symbolic meaning presented throughout his Frogtopia performances, including his act, words, costume, and props, and the transformation of Zen Paintings into an art performance in which the audience and nature can participate, embodying Taoism doctrine that all things are one 萬物齊一.

—**Suk Man Yip** is currently a PhD candidate in Sinology at the **University of Heidelberg** and studies with Prof. Barbara Mittler. She received a B.A. degree in Fine Arts from the Chinese University of Hong Kong and an MPhil degree in Humanities (Literature) from the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. After obtaining an M.A. degree in Modern Sinology from the University of Göttingen, she started her PhD studies at Heidelberg in 2021. Her research interests include East Asian History, Chinese Art and Literature, Hong Kong Culture and media studies. Her doctoral research is about the publicity strategies the Chinese Communist Party (the CCP) applied in the British colony of Hong Kong during the Cold War and the role of its official newspapers in several social and political incidents such as the 1966 and 1967 Riots.

Awards:

1. “Best Student Paper Award” at the International Graduate Conference, organised by Shanghai Jiaotong University and the University of Heidelberg, 2022.
2. “Excellent Paper Award” at the China’s Digital Humanities Conference, organised by the Renmin University of China, 2022.

² Kwok was invited by the Hong Kong Arts Development Council as one of the Hong Kong representatives to have a personal exhibition at the 54th Venice Biennale in 2011. During the exhibition period, Kwok, as a performance artist, created/played art with the audience in order to shorten the distance between people and bring out the concept that everyone can make art. Refer to: https://dw-media.tkwk.hk/epaper/tkp/20110609/A30_Screen.pdf.

³ The Sculpture combining Graffiti, Contemporary Chinese Ink Painting and Calligraphy, presents the harmony and happiness advocated by Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. It is a long-term displayed artwork at the Gate B of Ho Man Tin MTR station in Hong Kong. Refer to: https://www.mtr.com.hk/ch/customer/community/art_frogtopia_arch.html.

⁴ It was a performance Kwok did during the interview with a magazine, ZTYLEZ. Refer to: [【藝城遊記】永恆的蛙托邦 – 蛙王 郭孟浩 \(ztylez.com\)](https://www.ztylez.com).

The Stages and Performances of China's urbanization: An analysis of the urban as a stage of political and economic power and its impact on the urban bodies

Antonie Angerer & Anna-Viktoria Eschbach (joint paper)

The contemporary Chinese city is a unique example of urban modernity, where the human dimension emerges in speed. Urbanization in China is taking place at a pace that was once thought to take centuries, but is now occurring within decades of human lifetimes. This rapid change has resulted in almost 60 percent of China's landscape being urbanized. However, the rapid urbanization in China has had significant environmental impacts, contributing to the Anthropocene, pushing the complex relationship between urbanization and the environment to the forefront.

Antonie Angerer and Anna-Viktoria Eschbach will follow this development from a birds eye view down to its implications for the humans inhabiting the city. They start from the urbanization plan that gives the direction for everything to follow. And will then zoom in on museum spaces as something that has emerged as central symbolic structures in the spectacular growth of Chinese cities. Cities and museums follow a big master plan, rather than urbanization from below. Daniel Hartley highlights the relations between science and culture, capital, and nature, which are fundamental to the historical geographies of endless accumulation. The Chinese government has recognized the cultural industry's importance for the country's economic growth, resulting in the development of museums that project images of prosperity, innovation, and cultural sophistication. Museums also serve as instruments of China's urbanization policy, messaging domestic harmony and cultural parity with advanced economies.

After understanding the dynamics of China's urbanization process, the perspective will change to artworks that demonstrate the impact top-down urbanization has on the body. The paper will focus on three types of urban performance found in video art: the imaginary, the staged and the internalized. The urban plans that structure and form the environments of the city create space that only become urban through the activation and interaction of human to human and human to space relationships. Volunteers coming from different professional backgrounds, having different commutes through the city, are asked to perform a choreography developed by artists Lengyue and Xiaoxiao based on the Beijing subway system. The series of performances illustrates how urban planning and the socio economic structures of the city become embodied. The city as an urban imaginary is played with by artist Cao Fei asking a diverse group of residents to dance Hip Hop in Guangzhou of the early two thousands. The sensory experience of this specific urban aesthetic transforms the performers. In comparison to Xiao and Leng's work, the performers here take on a role performing the imagined urban and not the internalized.

Coming back to the urban as a stage for political performativity. We end with one of the biggest city projects in the making, the so-called Thousand year plan, Xiongan New Area. The urbanization of 1700 km² of land as an answer to solve the urban malady caused by China's rapid urbanization of the last three decades. It is a stage of a new urbanism under Xi Jinping. Filmmaker Daphne Xu shows how the local residents of the future city appropriate this stage of political power demonstration through claiming the spaces as their own

—**Antonie Angerer** is curator and co-founder of the art and artistic research platform I: project space (2014- 2020) in Beijing around topics of urbanization, gender concepts in the Asia Pacific, independent space practice, and new media and digital art practices. She is editor at tria publishing platform and co-founder of the independent art space festival Beijing. She is currently a PHD candidate at the Freie Universität Berlin researching the function of urban media in China's early rural-urban transformation processes. 2020 she joined as a junior researcher the BMBF funded project „Worldmaking: A Dialogue with China“ in the subproject „Social Worlds: China's cities as spaces of Worldmaking“ at the University of Würzburg.

—**Anna-Viktoria Eschbach** is a German-Hungarian curator and writer who has been active in China for almost a decade, developing projects that stimulate dialogue and experimentation between creative disciplines and cultures. Currently she is a researcher at the Curatorial Research Collective at the TU/e Eindhoven with the topic “Power, Politics and the Building of Contemporary Art Museums in China”. She has been working on projects for documenta fifteen, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, Artspace Sydney, CAFAM Beijing, and the Ludwig Museum Budapest. From 2014 – 2020 she built up the curatorial office and residency program, I: project space, in Beijing around topics of urbanization, gender concepts in the Asia Pacific, independent space practice, new media, and digital art. From 2015 to 2022, she was working on the long-term curatorial research platform Beijing22, documenting Greater Beijing's urban transformation. As part of the Swiss Chinese publishing house tria, she has published numerous books around art, theory, urban development, and China. Anna has received grants from Getty Foundation, Deutsche Bank, and Forum Scientiarum, and has had residencies at Artspace, Sydney and nBK, Berlin.

BIOGRAPHIES of the HOST and ORGANIZERS

Franziska Koch is a post-doctoral researcher and Assistant Professor to the HTCS Professorship of Global Art History at Heidelberg University and Transcultural Studies lecturer at the Heinrich-Heine-University in Düsseldorf. She currently works on her Habilitation project “The artist works (trans-)culturally: Nam June Paik and other Fluxus artists negotiating collaborative authorship” supported by a post-doctoral scholarship of the Baden-Württemberg Stiftung. The project examines a series of Fluxus collaborations regarding transcultural conditions, practices and limits of collaborative authorship. She is co-editor of the anthology “Negotiating Difference. Contemporary Chinese Art in the Global Context“ (VDG Weimar 2012) and author of “Die ‘chinesische Avantgarde’ und das Dispositiv der Ausstellung. Konstruktionen chinesischer Gegenwartskunst im Spannungsfeld der Globalisierung“ (transcript 2016). She co-founded both the “Research Network for Modern and Contemporary Chinese Art” (ReNetMoCoCA) and the “Research Network for Transcultural Practices in the Arts and Humanities“ (RNTP). Her teaching and research interests include art history/-ies and historiographies in transcultural perspective; modern and contemporary artistic entanglements, transfer and translational processes between East Asia (mainly China and South-Korea) and Europe; exhibition studies; questions of authorship and collaboration in the field of art.

Nora Wölfing is an art historian and sinologist who works as a curator, writer, and researcher specialized in contemporary art from China. She is pursuing her PhD at Free University of Berlin. Her research focuses on transcultural theories, feminism(s), technologies in art, and literature-based art. She teaches seminars about contemporary art from China at FAU Erlangen (2021) and University of Hildesheim (2023). Recent curatorial projects include LuYang's solo show “False Awakening” at Kunstpalais Erlangen, and solo projects with Mountain River Jump!, Fan Xi, and Vzela Kook. Nora is an active member of the Research Network for Modern and Contemporary Chinese Art. Her articles

are regularly published in print and online magazines, and she also writes artist portraits and catalogue essays.

Cila Brosius is a contemporary art curator, project manager, translator, and writer, fluent in English, German, Chinese (Mandarin), Danish and French. She holds a master's degree in Visual Arts Administration from New York University, where she wrote her thesis on Chinese curators and their influences on the internationalization of Chinese contemporary art. Through joint projects with international artists and arts professionals, she aims to inspire more wide-spread engagement with the complex world of art in and from China and other sinophone regions. Her current project focuses on exposing Scandinavian artists to a Chinese audience and vice versa, with the goal to foster cross-cultural understanding through the visual arts.

Xuan Ma is a Ph.D. candidate at Utrecht University, the Netherlands, supervised by Prof. dr. Eva-Maria Troelenberg (Utrecht University) and Dr. Franziska Koch (Heinrich-Heine Universität Düsseldorf). Xuan obtained her MA at the Department of History of Art and Archaeology, SOAS, University of London. Her current Ph.D. project "Permeable Borders: Examining Displacement in Contemporary Chinese Diaspora Art" focuses on the cross-border encounters in Chinese art since the 1980s and explores how contemporary Chinese migrant artists have reinterpreted their displaced experiences to negotiate pluralistic identities and engender transcultural dialogues in the globalized world.