

## Viral Transmission: A Medium in Between

OCAT Institute

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curator: Li Yizhuo

artists: Bai Mengfan, Peer Bode, Joan Snitzer, Eric Souther, Zhang Hanwen

At a time of escalating panic and uncertainty, how do we transgress the geopolitical borders that are simultaneously dissolved and reinforced by viral transmission? The utopian vision of digital network in its dawning years is giving way to the heightened fear of hegemony, surveillance, and exploitation, concerning both the circulated information and human users. Meanwhile, the transmission is shifting from a functioning tool that connects the tangible world to the new unseen and unknown. Viral transmission is, therefore, not only a way in which cultural memes are spread, but a self-constituting medium and subject that creates perplexing phenomena.

Airborne infections are prevailing in a battle of efficiency and resilience with a fearsome speed; the messenger is becoming the message, anticipating immunological reaction and psychological impact that will have enduring reverberations. Medium, form, body, and contrivance: What exactly do these terms entail? Contemporary art has been nimbly inverting spatial relations and casually navigating its habitat on and beneath, or even in and out of, the surface. The spectator is emancipated and repositioned in relation to the maker, and so is the medium. How is a virus supposed to transplant itself into a liquefied cell whose membrane is mobile and discernment of othering/ belonging unassured?

The exhibition includes five artists from China and the US who work in painting and digital media from distinct perspectives and points of departure. Spanning from emerging artists who embrace mobilized dwellings to artist-educators who have been convening students from various cultures, their practices propose to foreground a kind of technographic thinking that entwines personal narratives and an intermedial fable of our time. Paralleling pathogenic transmission and digital connectedness, the meaning is made through reflection and “diffraction,” as new materialists would suggest. Notably, the selected pieces are all born in a series or serial configuration, either deliberately or implicitly, thus forging unbridled openness within an individual work, between exhibiting artists, and across the associated contexts and happenings over time. The transmissive channels appear accidentally intentional.

“Television is a medium because it is neither rare nor well done”; this quotable remark usually attributed to Ernie Kovacs, the pioneering TV comedian, is a telling testimony on our hybrid age of advancement and haphazard. Indeed, we would baffle ourselves to name one thing that is either rare or well done; in other words, everything becomes a prospective medium and medium of a medium, followed by an infinite derivation. The above fallacy will by no means bear scrutiny, given its mischievous semantic plays, but

serves as a metaphor for our society's impulsive resolution of cognitive dissonance, a habitual seek for constructed consistency. Reflexive and parodic, Hanwen Zhang's *A Real Fake Artists* invests in and disengages from a self-referential structure, by removing the fictional character from his "rightful" locales, which are primarily created for this detachment. In a similarly embodied manner, Joan Snitzer's exuberant panels make an asserted response to the media's claim of fiction and reality, while studying the function of abstraction in a sociohistorical aspect. A pioneer video artist whose work grows from the 1970s inquiries to recent years, Peer Bode continues to explore the audiovisual and tactile mediality among apparatuses and the human body. Eric Souther's investigation of online social structures, focused on the White House and Buddha in this exhibition, argues to redefine the religious and cultural icons through the masses. At this junction of reality and virtual reality accessed via digital media, Mengfan Bai's paintings probe into the fraught concept of Ether and the universally adopted "throbber" on screens.

In the gallery, audiences are invited to sit and read the provided archival materials, to transmit and be transmitted within a viral web that oscillates between a medium and an indeterminate form.

## 又何间焉：病毒特性的多介质表达

策展人：李艺卓

又何间焉，我们何必置身其中？我们又怎能分离得开？人人自危的当下，地缘格局在病毒前濒临土崩瓦解，根深蒂固的社会边界却突显出来。我们时常谈论着，信息网络起初的美好愿景已逐渐被新的霸权、垄断、侵蚀所取代，由连接世界的途径成为新的不可见和不可预知。“病毒式传播”因此不仅仅是一种文化模因（meme）的扩散方式，更吸引艺术家对其背后媒介的形态和内涵进行思考，俨然有了生命甚至智能。病毒在令人心生恐惧的同时，也叹服其近乎极致的传播效率，对宿主而言，信使和信息已然等同，且同时在病原体感染和心理感知两个层面。那么何为媒介？何为形态？何为躯体？何为机能？当代艺术的创作中，空间内外、表里，作者与观者的秩序对挑战早已习以为常，病毒又如何感染这般边界模糊、不辨他我的机体？

展览选取了五位中、美艺术家的绘画、摄影、影像作品，从主体、视角、媒介、社会历史多个角度展现了数码时代下，环境介质和感官及躯体关联所引发的反思和“衍射”似的意义产生过程，后者尤见于新物质主义的理论中。值得注意的是，展览作品都来源于艺术家的系列创作，或数幅作品自成一体，或跨越时间、地域回归同一个概念或命题，这似乎也指向了作品自身内部、展览艺术家群体、不同事件场景和主体之间形成的偶然而富有深意的联结。

“电视是一种媒介（medium），因为它在新鲜（rare）和透彻（well-done）两者间取中等。”这句双关妙语通常认为出自电视喜剧先驱厄尼·科瓦奇，而在当下的语境生动地描述了这个混杂着进步与无序的时代。事实上，我们很难举出一件既稀罕又成熟的事物；换言之，万物皆可成为媒介，或媒介的媒介，以至无限衍生。上述语义游戏自然是经不起推敲的谬见，却符合人类始终寻求秩序和解释的冲动，总倾向于在自洽的构想中寻求庇护。张瀚文的展出作品正是在精妙的嵌套序列中引入失调，以虚拟的人物、空间和刻意的位移来讨论图像创作者与图像的关系。从类似的具身结构出发，琼·斯尼泽的绘画对媒体叙事中虚构和现实的经验作出回应，探究抽象艺术的传统和功能，以及在当今社会文化背景下的意义。作为影像艺术的前驱之一，皮尔·博德在其70年代至今的创作中不断思索着跨越感官和仪器、科技历史和个人创作历程的联系。埃里克·塞奥瑟的两件影像着眼于搜索引擎和视频分享平台搭建的“在线”社会结构，分别以“白宫”和“佛陀”为关键词，用自动生成的数千条结果对概念加以重塑和重新诠释。在对“以太”和屏幕加载图标的描绘中，白梦帆则将主观感受到的虚空叠加于概念和符号的历史、文化含义，来观察现实和虚拟现实的冲突。

欢迎各位观众选择展厅各处的折叠椅就坐，观看作品的同时翻阅提供的文献资料和策展人对艺术家的采访文稿，置身其中，去体会、对话“病毒特性”的媒介和形式，感染力和想象力。