未完成的开端：2025 的有关事项
The Incomplete Beginning: Notes on 2025

吴小军
Wu Xiaojun

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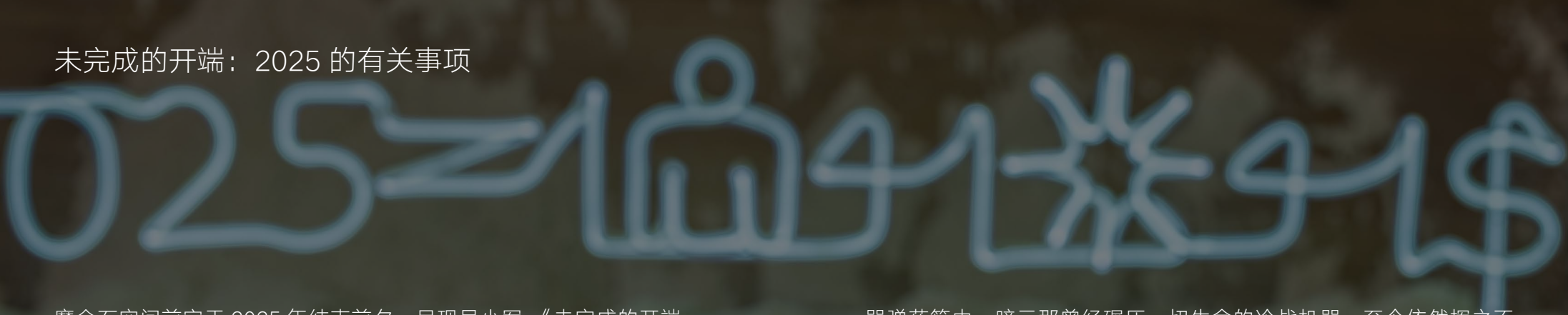


魔金石空间前室于 2025 年结束前夕，呈现吴小军 《未完成的开端：2025 的有关事项》，是艺术家 2008 年项目“2025 计划”的一次重访。年份 2025 来自杰弗里·萨克斯有关“2025 年世界终结极端贫穷”的推断，出于其 2005 年的著作《贫穷的终结》。这个思想在 2007 年传入中国后，吴小军将之总结成一个霓虹标语：一人日均一美元。作为当年高涨的后冷战全球主义高峰下一则自我审视的警语。

2008 年的吴小军注意到：一个人越是对那样的未来有所期待，就越表示个体认知的贫瘠孱弱。问题在于经济的成长能等同于认知的成长吗？为此他呼吁人们坚持劳动，以便真实清醒地重建自我。18 年之后，环顾今天的世界和新闻，吴小军把 2025 标语放在一个填满骨粉的武器弹药箱中，暗示那曾经碾压一切生命的冷战机器，至今依然挥之不去。而阿列克谢耶维奇出版于 2015 年的《二手时间》中，巨型政治解体后各自流散的生命，今天又再一次被卷起。

作为前杂志编辑，吴小军经常借用他人的话语，实则是在收集二手时间，以创造另一种时间政治的共同体。在展览期间，他将陆续放入收集来的二手物品和话语，以便让不同的生命经验彼此拉扯，各自表述，生产叙事。在这个过程中，现代化时间下辖的标准价值、进步价值、规模化的暴力或自我剥削都被搁置。最终，时间会否能交还给被否定，被剥夺，被暂停的二手命运？或者重唤劳动与团结的复归？

The Incomplete Beginning: Notes on 2025

Magician Space Antechamber presents its third project, "The Incomplete Beginning: Notes on 2025," in collaboration with Wu Xiaojun. Inaugurated at the end of 2025, this project reviews the past year while revisiting the year 2008, when Wu presented the exhibition "2025 Project" at Magician Space.

Both projects take Jeffrey Sachs's The End of Poverty—a 2005 book proposing 2025 as the endpoint for extreme poverty—as their point of departure. When the book was translated into Chinese in 2007, Wu interpreted it as a form of post–Cold War positivism unfolding under the wave of globalization. In response to Sachs's proposition, Wu created a manifesto-style neon work that reads, "One person earns one dollar a day by 2025," to warn against the fantasy of an unduly promising future.

Once a magazine editor, Wu often uses people's opinions and current events as artistic material to create works that serve as reminders of reality. In his neon manifesto of "2025 project", he poses a question: Does economic growth also lead to stronger self-consciousness? Seventeen years later, when Wu re-presents the manifesto in a Cold War–era ammunition box and buries it in bone meal, he suggests that the historical specter of the Cold War, which once crushed lives, has not been laid to rest. Through news and events around the world today, it is not difficult to recognize that people had never truly escaped the unavoidable upheaval followed the collapse of grand political systems, exactly as Svetlana Alexievich described in her book Secondhand Time (2015).

Over the course of the project period, Wu will gradually insert found objects and quoted fragments of speech into the exhibition space. In doing so, he gathers a form of second-hand time, constructing a community grounded in an alternative time zone of politics. Such juxtaposition allows these once-lived experiences to communicate, cooperate, and contradict one another while articulating and manifesting their own narratives. The continuously growing nature of the project places standardized values, narratives of progress, the violence inherent in scalability, and self-exploitation under the regime of modern time in provisional suspension. Perhaps in the end, time can ultimately be returned to those second-hand destinies that were previously negated, dispossessed, or put on hold, and may even call for the return of labor and solidarity.

2025 一個小故事

与吴小军对话

M = 魔金石空间研究部
W = 吴小军

W：这整个项目是我“2025 计划”的一个延续，叫“未完成的开端：2025 的有关事项”。这是一个整体，单独的作品就不特别分了。我不想做一个固定的展览给人看，几个月的时间里都不变，它是慢慢生成地。你看，我今天拿来了这个，明天我给你那个，也不是说要把一个作品拿走了再来另一个主题，它就一直在这儿，和我们的处境一样。然后在你观看的时候给你一些线索，你自己去思考。

整个项目我参考了东德关于时间的叙述，2025 只是个时间节点，展览整体是关于我们生活中的时间总体，它是以历史作为依据设计出来的。有个经济学家杰弗里・萨克斯在 2005 年写了本书叫《贫困的终结》，2007 年出版了中文译本，我在 2008 年看了以后，感觉它就像共产主义理想一样给了我们大部分穷人一个许诺，他说 2025 年可以脱贫，一人一天赚一美金就全世界脱贫了。一开始我拿着这本书对 2025 年还挺有期待的，但后来我发现，其实这可能只是对“奴隶”的奖赏，是制度本身给我们画的大饼。资本主义制造危机和制造贫困是它的本能，它只是给我们许诺了一个共产主义式的不可能实现的理想。今天战争依然在进行，刚打上了，又打上了。

M：弗朗西斯・福山的历史终结以后，共产主义在资本主义世界变成了另一种助燃剂，我们都在它的陷阱里。

W：对，我们很悲剧。虽然不是所有人都这样。

杰弗里・萨克斯提出的制度本身就是资本主义的工程师，出了问题它都能解决。它解决了很多问题，但其实不会改动本质，因为制造贫困是它的原理，就和我们艺术上制造稀缺一模一样，有了贫困和稀缺，财富才能转移。所以消除贫困就跟实现共产主义一样，都是个愿望，不能真正实现。什么叫公平？不可能公平，这只是愿望。你比我晚出生，我死的比你早，这就出现了不公平，除非人类以后永生。公平是我们追求的愿望，你不能没有这个愿望，尽管愿望不能真正实现，实现了就不是愿望了，对吧？所以共产主义是个幽灵。

M: 这里的幽灵和当年《共产主义宣言》里那个徘徊在欧洲的共产主义幽灵不一样了。

W：我们全部被达尔文和马克思主义的这种不好的进步论影响了，历史绝对不是线性的。因为我们的生命每次变化都是不确定的，人有欲望，欲望是完全不可预期的，机器、数码算不清这些。所以你想，我们人类永远在研究控制，但是永远在反控制，因为我们人是活体。这时候艺术在干什么？就是把这不可能的东西表达出来，这样我们才活得有意义。

Conversation with Wu Xiaojun

M = Magician Space Research Department
W = Wu Xiaojun

W: This entire project continues my "2025 Project," and I call it "The Incomplete Beginning." That's the title for the whole project; I won't differentiate each individual piece by name. I'm not aiming to arrange a fixed exhibition for people to view and have it remained unchanged for months. This exhibition grows gradually—I might bring one piece here today and add another tomorrow. It's not about removing one and replacing it with another. The works are simply in the space as much as we are living here. They give you clues to think for yourself.

The storytelling of this project is based on East German narratives of time, where the year 2025 only represents a particular node. Ultimately, the exhibition considers the time we are living in as an integrity constructed from historical cues. Jeffrey Sachs, the economist, wrote a book titled The End of Poverty in 2005; the Chinese edition was published in 2007. After reading it in 2008, I envisioned a certain promising communist pledge for many of us poor people: that by 2025 poverty could be eliminated by ensuring a person earns one dollar a day. Holding onto that book, I was initially quite hopeful about 2025. Later I realized this might be a mere reward for the "slaves," because the system itself speaks grandiosely of the unachievable. Capitalism thrives on the instinct to create crises and manufacture poverty. It only promises an unrealistic communist ideal. Wars continue in our time—one starts, then another.

M: As the era of Francis Fukuyama fades, communism has become an alternative fuel for the capitalist world in which we are all trapped.

W: Indeed. It's a pity, though not all of us are like that.

The system Sachs proposed is like an engineer of capitalism, offering solutions for whatever problems arise. It resolves many issues while skirting its essence, because producing poverty is a core part of capitalist logic. It's the same as how we create scarcity in art: only poverty and scarcity can stimulate the transfer of wealth. Eliminating poverty is like achieving communism—both remain wishes without realization. What is fairness? Absolute fairness is merely a hope. You were born later than I was and I will die before you do—that's unfair unless humans can live forever. Fairness is something we strive for; you shouldn't be without that wish, but this desire can never be fully satisfied. Otherwise it wouldn't be a desire anymore, right? That's why communism is a specter.

M: The specter here is very different from the one that hovered over Europe in The Communist Manifesto.

We've all been intoxicated by Darwinian and Marxist theories of evolution, but history is not linear. People have desires, and desires are totally unpredictable—machines and digital systems can't calculate them. Think about it. Humans are always trying to manage and control, while simultaneously resisting it because we are living beings. What does art do at times like this? It expresses those impossibilities, and that's what makes our lives meaningful.

CNNCCTV

W：我父亲是个特别有意思的人。他在部队里最后是解放军百科全书的编辑，编著过好多词条。他很喜欢现代化的东西，所以在进入朝鲜战场的时候他是掌握摄影机的那个人。这是他在朝鲜给战友拍的照片，驻扎在平安南道的第一志愿军总部。停战的时候在傍晚给战友拍的照片，有晚霞，两个人正在谈恋爱。女生正在吐了个舌头，有点不好意思。我觉得这张照片太好了，被卷入战争机器的人们还是会找到生命的空隙。我想了想就决定把这张照片放在这儿，作为开启，也是一个未完成的开端。

我一直认为所有的事件是一直在进行的。中国从 20 世纪以后就一直在“加入”的状态，从来没离开过国际。我们与美国的分裂也就是那么几年的事，但至今也没有完全脱钩。其实毛泽东在文化上也对国际有很强的影响，比如1968年的学生运动，中国对世界产生极其巨大的影响，那时候革命就是中国，一直到今天都还有这个精神残存。我在考量展览的最后要拿铝饭盒过来，我叫它“同质物品”，就是一个量化生产的东西，这是建构主义时期一个特别代表性的概念，是生产性的艺术。在那个语境下，进行艺术生产不是个人的事儿，是这个意思。

W: My father is a very interesting person. He ended up became an editor of the People's Liberation Army encyclopedia who drafted many of the entries during his time in the army. When he was serving on the Korean battlefield, he was the one in charge of the camera. This photograph was taken at the First Volunteer Army headquarters in South Pyongan Province, North Korea. One dusk, just after a ceasefire, he photographed his comrades against the evening glow hovering over this young couple in love. The girl was shy and stuck out her tongue slightly. I'm fascinated by how the photo offers a glimpse into the lives of people involved in the machinery of war. After some thought, I decided to place this photograph here—it serves as an opening as much as an incomplete beginning.

I have always believed that everything remains ongoing. China has been in a constant state of "participating" since the 20th century and never really left the international scene. Until recently, our breach with the United States — which is not fully — began only a few years ago. For example, the 1968 student movements led to considerable global impacts and to a notion of Chinese revolutions. That spirit still resonates today. I'm considering bringing in aluminum lunch boxes into the exhibition. It represents "homogeneous objects," products of quantitative production. This concept was especially important in Constructivism — the art of production in which artmaking is not an individual matter. That's the idea.

列宁是怎样
写作学习的

W：其实列宁 70% 到 80% 的著作都在监狱里写的，许多他的文字、对于整体的国家、社会的概念，包括对于工人运动的设想都是在监狱里形成的。奈格里同样，他是工人主义——就是曾经意大利的政治实践工人理论——的理论旗手，前几年他跟美国的麦克尔·哈特合著了一本《帝国》。这里说的其实是从过去的帝国主义过渡到今天的帝国。

直到现在我们都活在帝国里，包括我们当代艺术也在帝国的概念中，在文化帝国的概念中。为什么双年展这么厉害？因为我们都想要国际化，但什么叫国际化？它是一个普世标准，不能谈什么，能谈什么，这就是帝国意识。

M：《帝国》这本书的材料是什么？

W: 我用的是沥青，就是石油垃圾，石油沉淀、压榨到最后了，就变成了沥青。我用《帝国》的书做了个模子，完全按照那本书的大小、厚度做的浇筑。做完了之后我又加上了这个霓虹灯，我觉得它更像一个血管，一种雕塑的感觉。至于为什么是雕塑？因为我们的思想来源于雕塑——一方面是结构，另一方面是材料。结构是一个雕塑架，我们是在雕塑架的基础上进行雕塑。我们中国的思想基础就是列宁——包括国家、帝国主义理论——一直到奈格里的理论。从一般劳动——马克思的一般劳动——到活劳动的一个过程，这就是我们今天的状态。

列宁在整个 20 世纪的叙述中是关于国家主义的，这到今天在我们中国都是指导性的方针。但是我不是那样思考的。我设想的是他怎么工作，他的理论

是怎么建立的。他可能会组织工人，把工人变成一个理论队伍，这特别重要。为什么共产党是工人阶级的先锋队？它跟资本主义是完全不一样的体系，它通过教育工人，把工人变成理论小组。你看，当年毛泽东时候，文化大革命的时候，工人小组里没有农民，就只是工人组成的，他们建成了整个的国家。国家的基础是靠政党，这个政党是个纯粹的理论组织，并不是像咱们现在这样。

所以今天，包括伊朗革命中一个巨大的力量就是工人阶级，左翼伊朗现在很厉害，但是我们根本不了解。这种左翼跟我们是有关系的，我们中国本身从来没离开过国际，中国共产党早期和共产国际第三、第四国际的远东支部都有关联。所以说共产国际的国家主义是去民族国家概念的，无产阶级变为一个先锋，大家团结起来，全世界的人民、无产者联合起来，所有被压迫的人联合起来就是新阶级。但现在的我们既不是真正的共产主义那一套，也不是美国、法国式的民主，我们是跟西方封建主义残余搅在一起的混合物，而艺术就是要去挖掘这些让人不愿面对的部分。

W: Actually, 70–80% of Lenin's work was written while he was in prison — his writings and the formation of his concepts of the state, society, and the workers' movement itself were developed there. The same applies to Negri, a leading theorist of workerism in Italy. He coauthored a book titled Empire with the American Michael Hardt several years ago. That book marks a shift from the imperialism of the past to the empire of today.

We are still living in an empire — a cultural empire that shapes our contemporary notion of art. Why are biennials so powerful? We want internationalization, but what does internationalization mean? It is a universal standard that defines what can and cannot be discussed — an imperial consciousness.

M: Can you talk a bit more about the materiality of this book Empire here?

W: I used asphalt, a petroleum residue pressed fully down. I made a mold from a copy of the book, casting it to the exact same size and thickness, and then added this neon light. It looks more like a blood vessel and conveys a sculptural feeling. Why sculpture? Because our thought comes from it — on one hand structure, and on the other material. Practically, sculpture is often made on an armature, which essentially is a structure. Meanwhile, China's theoretical foundation moves from Lenin's theories of the state and imperialism to Negri's theories. Alternatively, it is a shift from the general Marxist labor to living labor that defines our conditions today.

In the whole 20th-century narrative, Lenin represents statism, which still

informs China today. But I don't map my thoughts that way. I think about how he worked and how his theories were constructed: he organized workers and turned them into a theoretical force — that's especially important. Why is the Communist Party the vanguard of the working class? It's a system fundamentally different from capitalism: it educates workers and turns rank-and-file members into theoretical actors. Look at Mao's time, especially during the Cultural Revolution: the groups were constituted of not peasants but purely workers — worker-theoretical groups — and that's how the state was built. The foundation relied on the party, which was essentially a theoretical organization rather than what we have now.

So today, one major force remains the workers' group. The Iranian left is powerful, though we hardly understand its full scope. This leftist structure connects to us. China has never been isolated from international movements — the early CCP was closely related to the Comintern's Far Eastern branches. Thus, the Comintern's internationalism sought to transcend the nation-state: the proletariat becomes a vanguard through a united public; all the oppressed come together and form a new class. Now we live in neither true communism nor American- or French-style democracy; we are thoroughly mixed with the remnants of Western feudalism. Art should address precisely those aspects we hesitate to confront.

NCCTV
HdMGALLERY

W：这里的”CCTV”指的是我当年在报社工作时合作过的央视，不是监控，但它也可以两个都是。我拿 CCTV 的 logo 对比美国 CNN，我发现它们的 LOGO 是相通的，中间都是红色，而且字体很相似，同时也都是国家的主流叙事。然后你看，这个灯一闪，”嘣”就变成”错”的了。一短路就变成“WC”这两个字母了（字母 NNC 连写起来看上去像是“WC”）。“厕所”藏在两个媒体里面来回闪，不注意就过去了。

这件作品本身不在我最开始预想中，但它在空间中一亮，我们就在整个媒体当中，也在媒介上，等于说在整个一个大监控里面。既是媒体也是一个监视行为。

W: "CCTV" here refers to China Central Television, which I collaborated with when I worked for the newspaper — not surveillance, though the abbreviation can stand for both. I juxtapose the Chinese CCTV logo with the American CNN logo for their parallels: a red center, similar typefaces, and comparable representations of mainstream narratives. When the light flashes and "bangs," the logos feel off. With a short circuit the letters can momentarily read like "NNC," or resemble "WC" (water closet), meaning a toilet — though that reading is easily lost in the flicker.

This piece wasn't part of my original plan for the space. But when it lights up, we feel confined inside total media and exposed to the medium itself. It addresses both media and surveillance.

M: 这些照片的内容是什么？

W：在 571 工程 40 周年的时候，我特意找了一天到那个事发点去。571 工程大致来说，就是一次刺杀毛泽东的行动，是林彪的儿子组织策划的。当年就在这个桥上，他计划用火焰喷射器执行刺杀。

这三张照片都是同一天拍的，桥旁边不知道是什么人在那儿烧纸，说不清祭奠谁。等到我回到附近的村里去，村里正好有一个那个年代的老发廊，现在绝对没有了。这让我觉得，历史有时有一种特别强的偶然性，在尘埃落定后又变成了必然。

M：这段墙上手写的内容是？

W：开展前一天发生的香港宏福苑大火一下刺激我了。我在网上看到了这段文字，是那个人在自觉临终前，特别绝望的时候写了这句话，在网上传给别人，我把它记下来。我常会选取人在不同时刻的表达，那些话语是有力量的。

M: Can you tell us more about these images?

W: One day, on the 40th anniversary of Project 571, I deliberately visited the historical site. Project 571 was essentially an assassination plot against Mao, conceived and planned by Lin Biao's son. The plan was to carry out the attack on this bridge using flamethrowers.

These photos were taken that same day. Someone anonymous was burning paper money there as a memorial; I didn't know for whom. When I returned to the nearby village, I came across an old-style barbershop that presumably no longer exists. It made me think how much of history is accidental, though some elements feel inevitable though the passage of time.

M: Is there any specific message behind this handwritten paragraph here?

W: The Wang Fuk Court fire coincided with the exhibition opening, and it stunned me. This passage is something I found online. The author was desperate for life when they wrote it and decided to share it. I saved the note. That's what I usually do — record others' voices in different circumstances — because I believe in the power of words.

W：这件作品是关于俄罗斯早期，大概 1930 年代的构成主义和至上主义在文字上的一种设计。我通过这个来说”未完成的开端”。在 1930 年代，社会主义早期曾经包含了一种文化上的意义和运动。这种文化运动一直到后来变成”至上主义”，再到”构成主义”，再慢慢因为苏联的政治制度的干预而消失。最终在整个文化史上慢慢退却，被掩盖起来。

这条道路其实是一条关于艺术生产的道路。我在疫情期间被关了很多天，写了 15 张俄语的，关于当年苏联的一些政治笑话，我用一个苏联当时的俄文字体写它的政治笑话，笑话内容就不说了，可以自己查，大概意思是“约瑟夫同志你何时勃起”。

M：上半部分打印的内容呢？

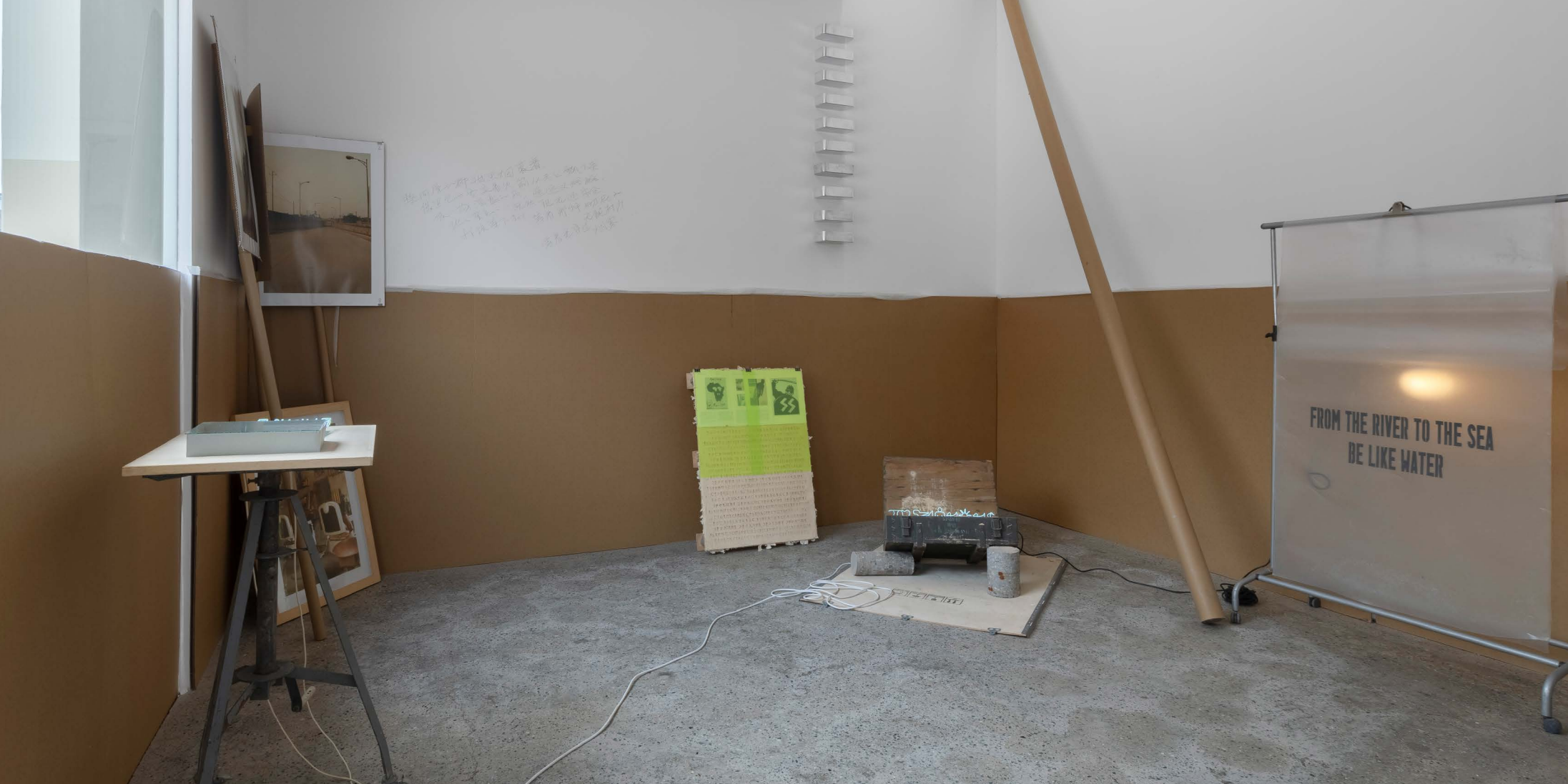
W: 这是设计史中一些至上主义的延续。在设计和宣传上面的社群运动很多，到最后落实的是壁画运动和宣传画运动，宣传画运动早期是字体设计，就是它的一个严格的延续，我特别偶然地在我的资料中找到的。我在今天看到了这个广告，当年它就是一场社会文化形态的运动，它体现在设计上面，而我们的宣传画早期其实都是属于这个运动的末端。整体来说，所谓在时间里持续生长的项目，是你可以看到历史中的暴力还有革命的旧神话，曾经思想的理论给了我们人类一个新历史的开端，而今天我们回头来看，会发现自己依然生活在它们的遗绪。

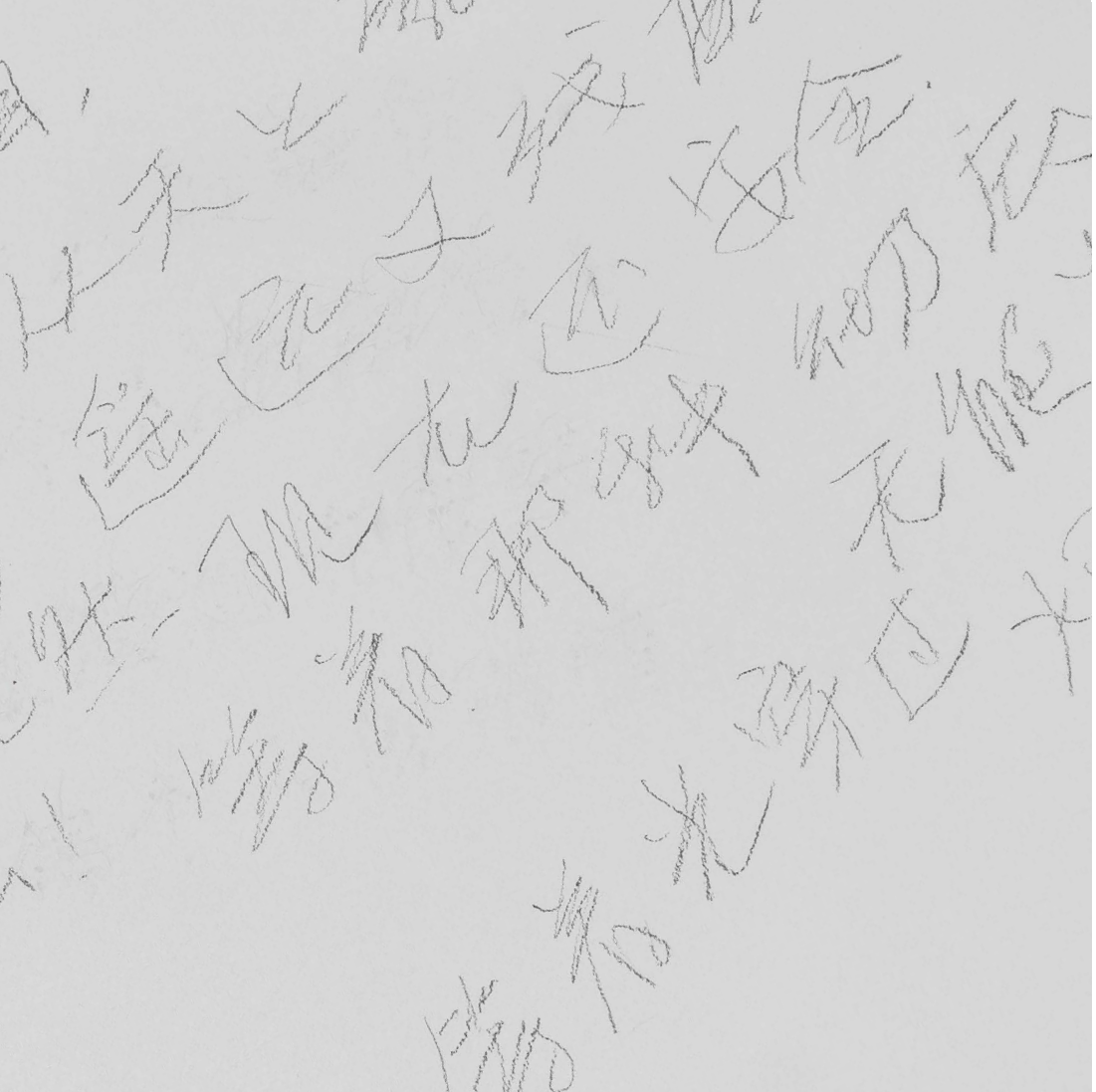
W: This work examines how early Russian design — those influenced by 1930s Suprematism and Constructivism — was applied to text. With it, I want to express an "incomplete beginning." In the 1930s, early socialism was a culturally significant movement. That movement evolved into Suprematism and then Constructivism but gradually disappeared because of intervention by the Soviet political system. It retreated into cultural history and was eventually veiled.

This path is essentially a trajectory of artistic production. During the pandemic I was in lockdown for many days and wrote about 15 Soviet Russian political jokes. I set them in a Soviet-era Russian typeface — I won't recite the full joke, but it goes roughly as "Comrade Joseph, when will you get an erection?"

M: Can we elaborate on the printed parts at the top of the work?

W: This is about the continuation of Suprematism in design history. There were many community movements around design and propaganda that ultimately materialized as mural and poster campaigns. Early on, it was essentially typeface design—a direct continuation of that tradition—which I found in my archives by chance. When I look at these advertisements today, it's clear they were a socio-cultural movement expressed through design, and our early propaganda posters fit within the later stage of that movement. Overall, in this so-called growing project you can see the violence of history and the worn myths of revolution. The theoretical envisions that once offered humanity a new historical beginning were later forgotten by most. Yet when we look back today, we still find ourselves living in their shadows.


FROM THE RIVER TO THE SEA
BE LIKE WATER



关于艺术家

吴小军，毕业于南京艺术学院，现在生活工作于北京。九十年代以来他以多重身份游离于绘画，雕塑，摄影，文字，标语口号，行动，装置等多种艺术形态之中，并借助大量的历史文献与社会政治事件，试图以自治的艺术主体搭建新型的思想舞台与社会模型，使其成为日常的美学行动。近期他的主要工作是以行动与对话的方式实践艺术作为一种解放力量的可能。

About the Artist

Wu Xiaojun graduated from Nanjing University of the Arts and is now living and working in Beijing. Since the 1990s, he has adopted multiple roles while maneuvering around various methods of artistic expression such as painting, sculpture, photography, text, slogans, actions, and installation. Drawing inspirations on extensive historical documents and socio-political events, he attempts to build an intellectual stage and social model through autonomous artistic subjects, making it an everyday aesthetic practice. His recent work mainly explores art as a potential emancipatory force through actions and dialogue.

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