

# 关小 幸存者的狩猎

2013.01.12 - 2013.03.12

SURVIVORS  
GUAN XIAO SURVIVORS' HUNTING  
HUNTING

魔金石空間 MAGICIAN SPACE

## A Place for Work to Grow

Text: Su Wei

Core sample is a concept often employed in geological explorations – drilling into substances and preserving the obtained materials in a hollow cylinder steel pipe called hollow mill. Researchers could then study the structure of the distribution of the substances from its cross section. Guan Xiao (born 1983 in Chongqing province, China) has a particular obsession with “core sampling” as a working method in her artistic practice. In her imagination, those with and without life, from the past and the present, the material objects and the objects of thoughts, all of these could appear as core samples in the infinite sections in her creative work.

It is not difficult to comprehend the reasons for the collage of fragments in *Documentary: Geocentric Puncture* (2012) – a tripod connected to a hand made of resin in the shape of a handgun, creating a conflicting but familiar dynamic with another hand that connects with rubber tubes, to a plaster cast of a head which appears to be the subject of archaeological studies, that is placed on a blue metal bucket of a similar size and shape. Through detaching, hinting, reconstructing and teasing... the artist sculpts these ready-mades into different collections of images and concepts, presenting them to us in a light, with all apparent seriousness, vulgarity and subservience, but powerful and in all strangeness. This appears to be an excessive linguistic act, an attempt at dissecting and reconstructing

syntactic structures. Every object that appears in the work has had a double division, not bearing its own value (a division from the self), also lacking any actual connection and meaning in this temporal context (a division from the first text). The object has then become the material in the text in which the artist has written about in another text. This narrative drama presents itself to us in the form of pure aesthetics, its playfulness is even more thorough than the structuralist practice that we are familiar with. Objects do not merely become symbols, but also the dissociation that comes before.

What we must ask is, what is the basis of Guan's practice? In other words, what does core sampling mean to the artist herself?

While entering the world of infinite possibilities, we have not reached the endgame of the objects that appear in Guan's work. While speaking about his choice of the use of “ready-mades”, Marcel Duchamp once described it as “without any aesthetic dominance”. For a very long time, especially in the history of our own land, the tendency to aestheticize has created all kinds of different faces. Duchamp was good at methods such as the combining ready-mades with text to guide the spectators' thoughts away from the traditional visual aestheticism. At the same time, it highlights the artist as a creator, and not merely an artisan. Guan has carried forward this read-made creative work, though a very important point is that, aesthetics has played an important role in her practice all along. Guan has strived to create a visual aestheticism whether it was through her method of collage that exaggerated the roughness of the materials and the overall visual effect of the work, or the seemingly totemic monuments titled *Cloud Atlas* at her current solo exhibition Survivors' Hunting at Magician Space. What needs to be understood further is the over-simplified judgment on the visual, material and the vision in our art history, which could easily be confused with the artists who strives for products

with instant results. While searching for the crucial connection between the conceptual and the visual presentation, or perhaps constructing a recognizable ideographic system is not the basis of Guan's creative aestheticism.

From this point, we could then proceed to restore Guan's “core sample” work. The “cross sections of things” that the artist extracts seem to always gather together as a group of related objects. They clearly do not appear to be partially in a world as an entirety, and therefore do not embody the meaning of a core samples. What is interesting is her passion in searching for fragments of knowledge as material for her creative work. Let's not dive into the digital information itself that is the object of this archaeological material on the internet, but rather, the paradox of choice, the claustrophobic, imprisoning vision of unlimited freedom – an extraction within a closed-off, fragmented virtual space where no overall strategy is provided, extraction itself is redundant. In the video work *Cognitive Shape* (2012) in her current solo exhibition, she employed footages collected from the internet and television media, arranging them according to their similarities in temporal behavioral logic in their physical and contextual properties. For example, the movement of the tail of a snake reacting to the zookeeper; hand signs for English alphabets with a floating ACID smiley face balloon; the heating of the stones before magnetic therapy; simulating footprints on the moon. This seemingly chaotic sampling and arrangement, makes what is happening on the screen seem complicated and full of semiotic implications. It is not the questions that the artist has for the audience. Perhaps we could describe it as an attempt in looking at creative work through making work. It has in fact perfected Guan's unique ready-made aestheticism – these materials are in themselves full of the signs of something really personal but also something very spontaneous, and through assimilating in the artist's own terms, the process of how they become creative

materials has been maximized. In other words, after two rounds of decisions, the artist has chosen it as raw material, the artist has chosen it to appear in the work in the form of raw material – these ready-mades have gained legitimate power. This subtle switch precisely explains the artistic connotations of core sampling, that it is how the artist examines the creative product through the process of creation. In Guan's own words, this is a process of "knowing the world to forming thought and at last returning to work". This breakthrough of knowledge, or the pushing-forward of the creative mind would pull the artist from the state of being in the studio directly to the place where she would be faced with artistic creation itself.

*Cloud Atlas* is a name taken from a novel of the same title written by British writer David Mitchell. There are multiple storylines intersecting from the postcolonial era after the industrial revolution up to the future society. Civilization crumbles at its peak of advancement, and the supposed "progress" is seen as "barbaric" and destroyed, mankind once again enter the age of Enlightenment, as the world enters yet another cycle of development. Borrowing from the title of this novel shows Guan's clear interest in objects, as they are the otherness to our historical existence, the first witnesses to the cycle of being moulded and destroyed. The artist has taken five objects from the knowledge system in reality, and turned them into something of a totemic nature, they are then placed onto five separate monumental sculptures. There is a digital photographic work hung on one of the walls in the exhibition hall – *Atlas* (2012), where the artist has clearly listed the process of her knowledge of these ready-mades in the name of art, including ancient and modern images and symbols taken from art history or from the wider field of culture. Echoing the five large monuments, there is *Museum Approach* (2012) – a face moulded in brass that looks something like an ancient tribal mask, symbolizing a possibility of these five types of

images being incorporated together, and at the same time, hinting at the endless cycle of creation. The objects extracted by Guan's imagination have become much poetic from then on. This unique ready-made aestheticism and the conceptual practice of the nature of mind-playfulness have in essence differences with the concrete conception of history of the world, as though the elegy of objects has inopportunely incorporated into our experiences.

Adopting the sampling method, temporarily releasing objects from the usual senses in daily experiences, through a series of subjective naming and ruling, analysing and establishing categories, this method of borrowing from natural sciences as a way of opening up artistic practices has also led us to think about some practices that had appeared in the brief history of Chinese contemporary art. For example, artist Wang Jianwei's work *Document* (1992), a simulated process of experiment where the artist labelled objects such as green beans and soybeans as substances a, b, c... turning these objects into abstract elements that exist outside of the empirical world. The artist then conducted a series of experiments within his own set of new rules, resulting with what appeared to be "objective" figures recorded on glass. In the context of Wang's practice, this work was the turning point of his practice going from painting into multi-media, and also a reflection on the popular question of what conceptual art meant at that time. What was interesting is that, if it was to said that Wang wished to borrow from the logical and the symbolic system to construct his own knowledge system, it would counter-question the tendency to create art with the lack of any inner motive. However, this symbolic "logic system" does not appear in Guan's work, where the ready-mades have in themselves gained an artistic quality, where an object is the object itself, and the artist is not a spectator who has been kept out of the affair.

Hence Guan Xiao's core sampling cannot be put in abstract terms as a monopolized way of observing the world, but rather, a place for creative work to grow, something within an artist's duty - quoting from the video *Cognitive Shape* (2012) – "displaying what has already happened in a clearer way, describing what has already been said in clearer terms".

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Installation View



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Art Works



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*Cognitive Shape*  
2013  
3-screens digital HD video  
8'12"  
Edition: 1/5





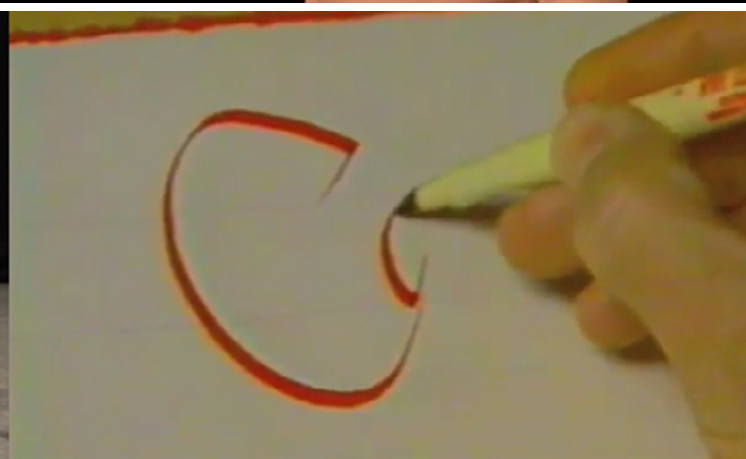
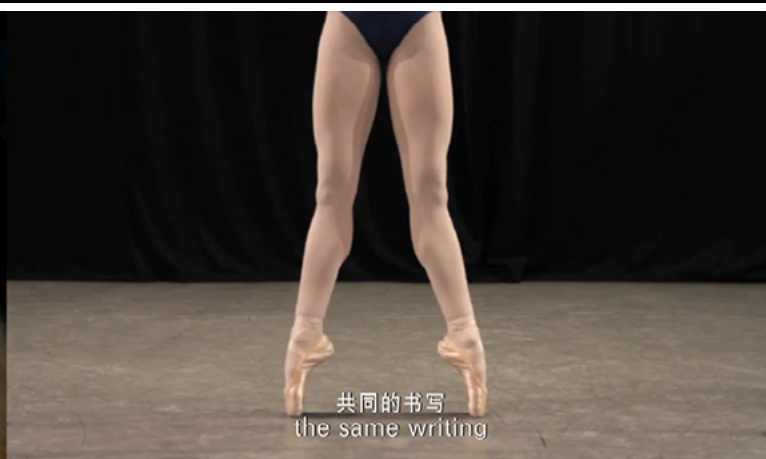
### Artist Statements

In this age of the Internet and media, information is presented to us multi-dimensionally. We are able to access the Internet freely within seconds. Knowledge is without boundaries, intelligence has not been changed, they all but function for a recurring overall service.

I've collected and filmed about a thousand video clips according to my own interests and aesthetics over a long period of time, some of these materials were taken from YOUTUBE and VIMEO, some were recorded from satellite television and DVD, and also the shooting fragments in my daily life. They cover all categories of information, region and culture. Around 30 clips were selected according to color, form, structure, environment, speed, performance, purpose, subject and functionality etc. before being edited.

I have divided the video into five chapters as follows – “Primitive Senses”, “Story of the Stone”, “History”, “Art, As a Historical Phenomenon”, “Pictorial Communication”. Together they present the process “from my understanding of the world, to the formation of my thoughts, and lastly back to my work”.

I've created a visual structure using editing, and from then a certain logic in language that presents the shape of thinking in my practice, while attempting to present visually, the possibility of the process of “seeing to thinking”.

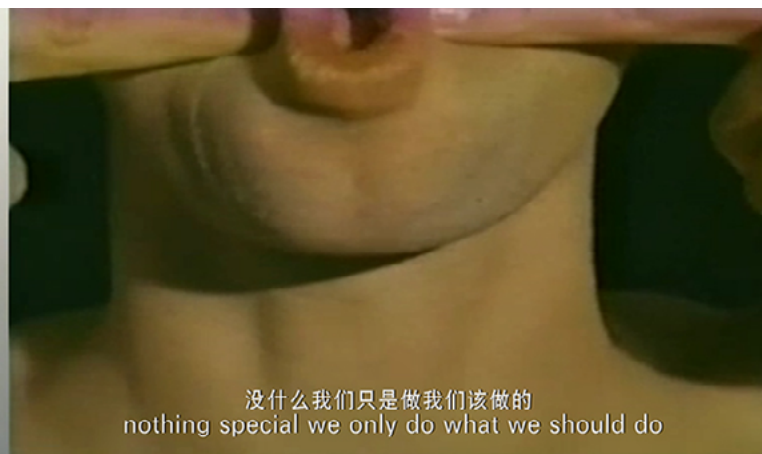


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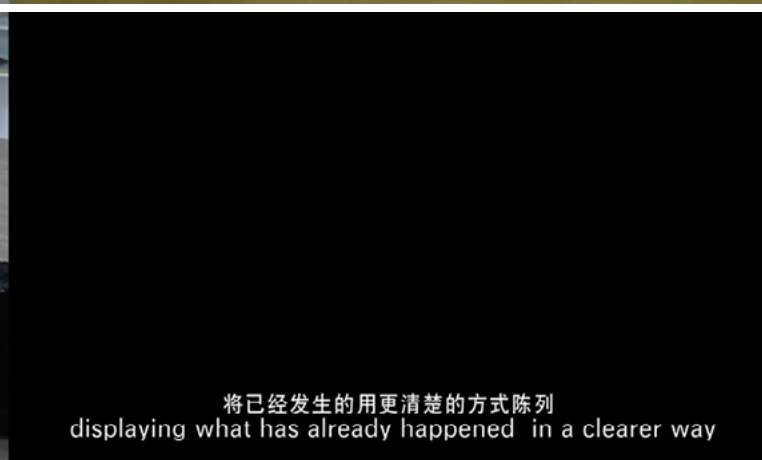




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没什么我们只是做我们该做的  
nothing special we only do what we should do



将已经发生的用更清楚的方式陈列  
displaying what has already happened in a clearer way



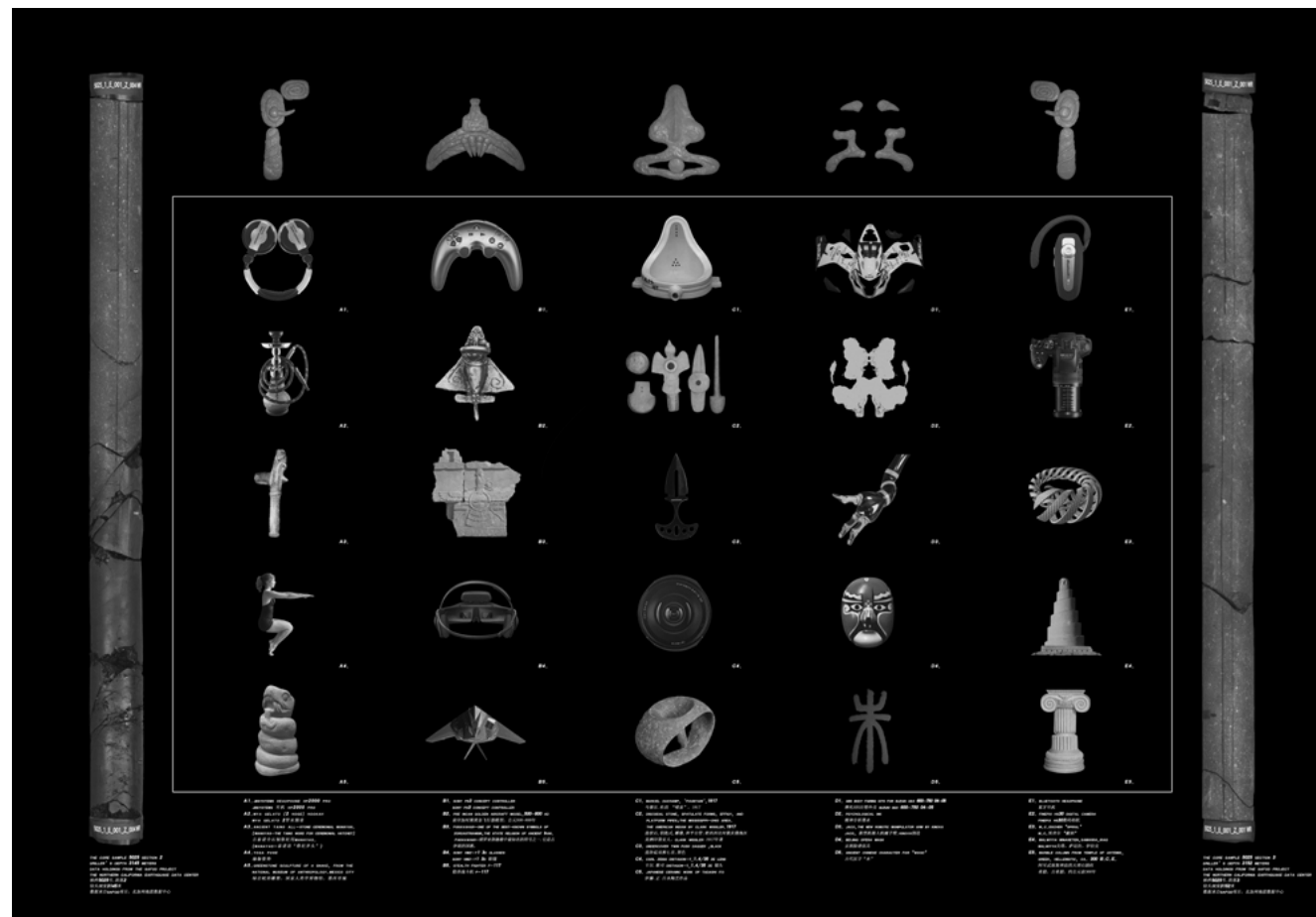
语言在方形旁边的沟通  
language is communicated besides the shape of square



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*Atlas*  
2012-2013  
b/w acid free digital print  
130x90cm  
Edition: 1/6



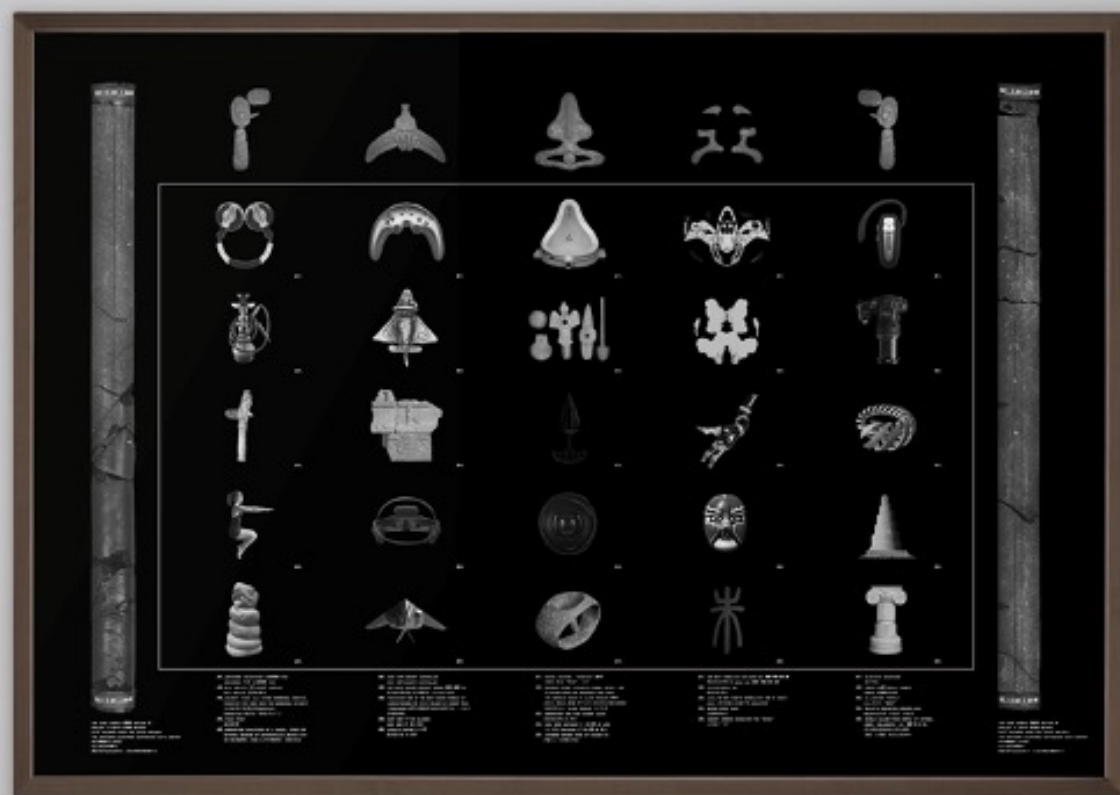
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### Artist Statements

At the same time, on the wall in the exhibition hall, five separate shapes of where the forms originate will be displayed and labeled clearly individually.

By displaying my creative shapes process in simple diagrams I aim to guide the audience into my logic system of “how to see the world” and to read in their own different terms, completing their own imagination according to the objects.

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*Cloud Atlas*  
2012-2013  
5 parts sculpture (resin, wood  
board)  
270 x120 x50cm  
Edition: 1



#### Artist statements

Title borrowed from the novel written by David Mitchell (it interconnects different stories from the colonial era after the industrial revolution all the way to modernity, which then develops to the highly developed society in the future, followed by the destruction of civilization, where the original “advancement” is seen as “barbaric” and hence slaughtered. Everything then starts from the beginning, where mankind once again enters the age of Enlightenment, and into the world that continues its cycle of development). In the overall sense, its narrative structure consists of a never-ending cycle, which aids the writer to convey his thoughts on the development of civilization. If we use now or the present as a point in time to fold the linear time into two halves, then the past and the future would inevitably be overlapped.

I have taken objects from different knowledge systems in reality and turned them into totems, I then made them into a sculpture of five separate parts, scattered around the exhibition site.

There is no fixed answer to what these independent shapes embody, though they might appear to be similar in form. While they use bright visual effects and deliberately exaggerate their volume, there is a clear figurative connection that attempts to lead the audience to actively thinking about what them (the objects) are? And what they could become to?

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*The Core Sample*  
2012-2013  
5 pieces metal sculpture  
dimensions variable  
Edition: 1/3



Artist Statements

A model illustrating how I see the world.

I've started using the method of "core sampling" since the beginning of my practice, combining elements taken from different times and backgrounds, constructing another way of "seeing". It also represents the constant encounter between the physical world around us and our inner spiritual world, and through these encounters we would begin our journey of discovery.

The idea of core sample does not confine within geography and science but could also be applied in biology and culture.

(A core sample is a cylindrical section of (usually) a naturally occurring substance consistent enough to hold a layered structure. Most core samples are obtained by drilling with special drills into the substance, for example sediment or rock, with a hollow steel tube called a core drill. A variety of core samplers exist to sample different media under different conditions. Core samples can also be taken of living things, including human beings. The competence of the subject materials can vary from almost liquid to the strongest materials found in nature or technology, and the location of the subject materials can vary from on the laboratory bench to over 10 km from the surface of the Earth in a borehole.)

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*Museum Approach*

2012-2013

brass sculpture

23 x 16 cm

Edition: 1/6

Artist Statements

Objects exhibited and information presented in museums might not be the accurate answers. Solutions that appear to be solutions are merely a fraction of possibilities.

We need questioned to the authority and standard answer.



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Guan Xiao CV

Guan Xiao

1983    Born in Chongqing  
Currently lives and works in Beijing

Solo Exhibitions

2013    *Survivors' Hunting*, Magician Space, Beijing, CN

Group Exhibitions

- 2012    *Sunset Vacuum Plug*, Taikang Space, Beijing, CN  
         *Accidental Message: Art is not a System, not a World - The Seventh Shenzhen Sculpture Biennale*, OCT Contemporary Art Terminal (OCAT), Shenzhen, CN  
         *Blind Spots*, Yang Gallery, Beijing, CN
- 2011    *Gallery Hotel Art Project*, Gallery Hotel & Tang Contemporary Art, Beijing, CN  
         *Follow*, MOCA Shanghai Museum, Shanghai, CN
- 2010    *Will You Miss Me When I Burn?*, C-space, Beijing, CN  
         *Mummery*, Art channel, Beijing, CN  
         *TORA TORA TORA - Chinese Cutting-Edge Photography Exhibition*, Caochangdi Red No.1, Caochangdi No. 53, Beijing, CN
- 2008    *Self Experience*, Platform China, Beijing, CN  
         *China Design Now*, V&A Museum, London, GBR
- 2007    *SWEN China - Chile*, Sergment Space, Beijing, CN  
         *FLOATING - New Generation of Art in China*, National Museum of Contemporary Art Korea, Seoul, CN  
         *Infantization*, Shanghai Art Museum, Shanghai, CN

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