

刘 野夫： 第一集

Liu Yefu: Episode 1

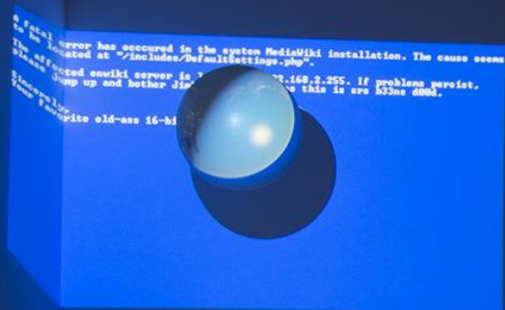
2016.05.14 - 06.26

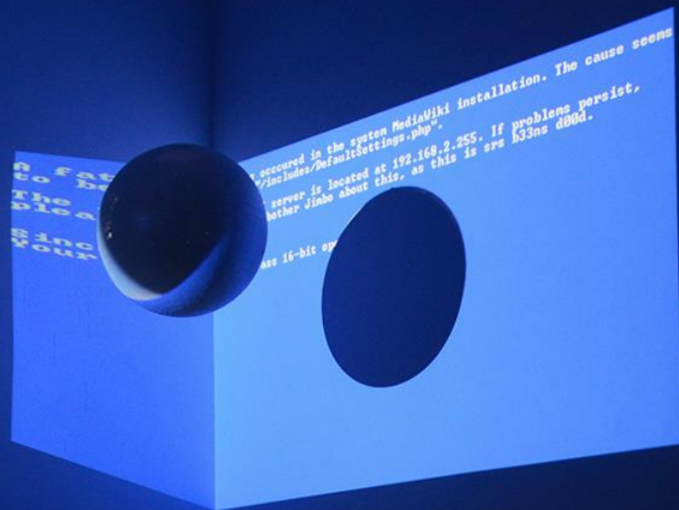
Opening: 05.14, 4 to 6.30pm



Beneath the surfaces of Liu Yefu's images, there lies an underlying logic of dissection and physical examination. Aberrant themes and distortions of information enter through unanticipated openings, emerging as he focuses upon the global excesses lurking from within the audio-visual mass culture of the West. He probes at its vast apparatus, working with material taken from a trove of various sources. Behavioral traits, trends, body gestures, phrases or the intonations of foreign voices fall under his analysis.

Hijacked from their original channels of mass distribution and consumerism, new beings begin to emerge from this process, which are then inspected from unpredictable angles and exposed under duress through his amateurish technique of editing. These figures and creatures from virtual or real worlds become compressed as they format themselves into digital surfaces that waver between their 2 & 3 dimensional forms – recalling connections to a miscellany of formats, failed commodities, and genres: low-budget infomercials, live online streams, classical masterpieces, museum art tours, adult films or absurdist b-movies.





3013: A Space Lover

2013

Multi-channel HD video installation, dimensions variable

7'21"



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在等待的十分钟里 我会做其他准备工作







640W 139th St.

2014

Single channel HD video

Color, sound

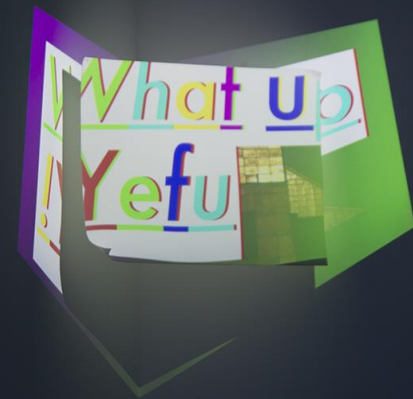
6'46"

What up! Yefu

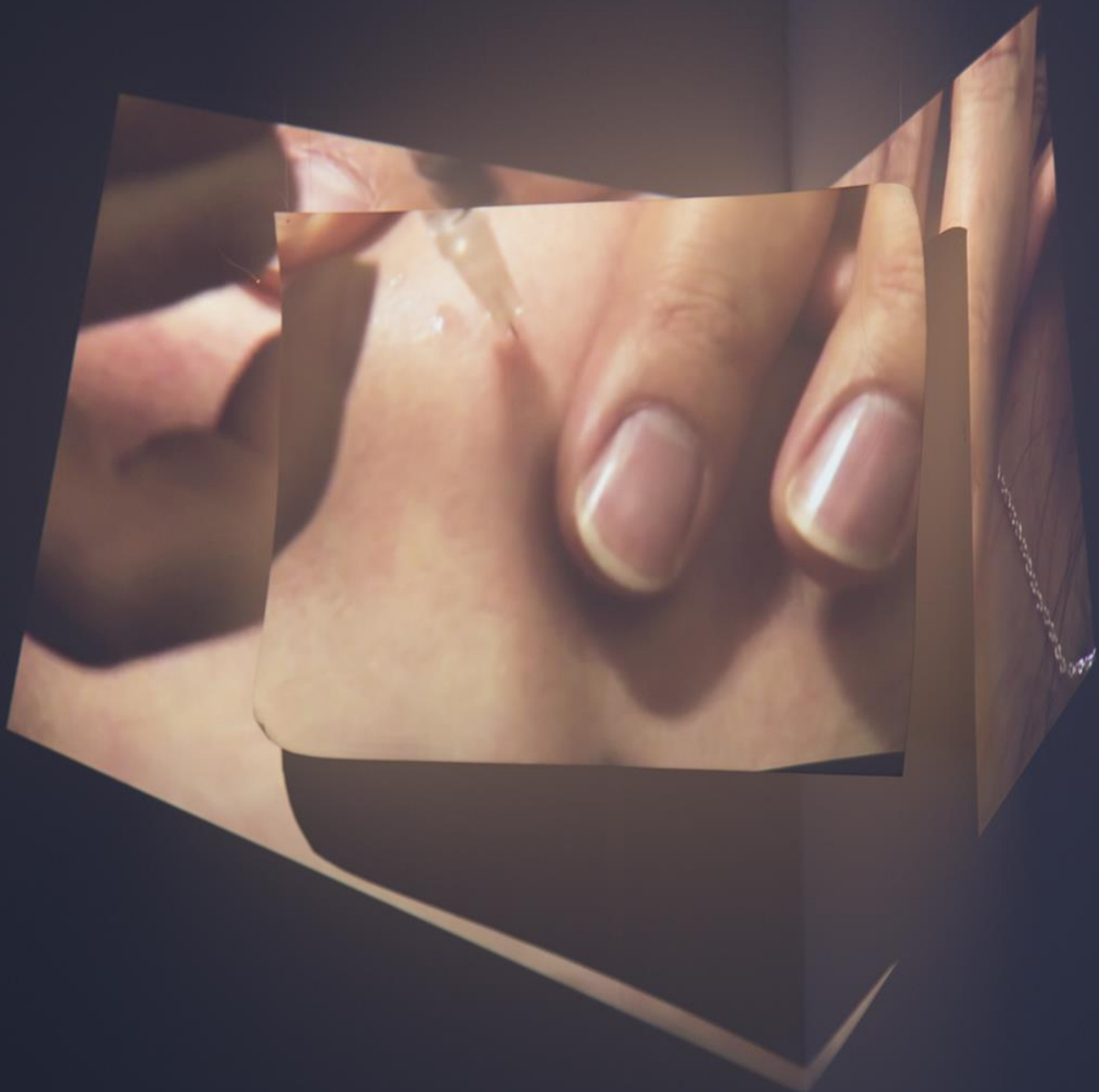
2014

Single channel HD video, 3D-printed paper

10'34"









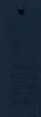
York News

Double channel HD video projection
3D-printed screen, dimensions variable
10'40"









L A B O R



(劳动)

从水升华为空气 从过去徜徉到现在

Linda

2016

Single channel HD video

B&W, sound

8'14"



又像洗礼的场面







RADICAL

MAGICIAN SPACE
魔金石空间

TASTY

Howie Chen: What up! Yefu.

Yefu Liu: Yo yo yo yo yo, what up! What up!

HC: My first introduction to your video work was in 2014 when I was curating a juried exhibition titled Present Tense in Philadelphia. I remember previewing *What up! Yefu* (2014) and *3013: A Space Lover* (2013) and both works left a lasting impression on me — we eventually included the latter piece in the exhibition. I had just finished teaching a class at M.I.T. called *Cinematic Migrations* in which we discussed the global migrations and emergence of cinemas around the world. What immediately struck me about your video work was that it effectively embodied a very contemporary migration, also one that is specific to your experience as a practicing artist and a new global “creative”.

I want to start off the interview with a few contextual questions — these are also questions I had when I first encountered your work. Can you briefly talk about where in China do you come from and where you studied art before you came to the U.S.?

YL: I’m from Beijing. Before, I was in in Capital Normal University as a painting major. The reason I came to the U.S. was because my family friends were living in Baltimore and told me the city was cool. Also at the same time, Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) had just sent me an acceptance offer too. Also the other thing was that I received a scholarship from MICA. They gave me money, which I thought was pretty ok too.

HC: What was your experience and impressions of American art school in comparison to your art training in China?

YL: It felt great at MICA. But after a while, I found out it was also just another system of education. For me, the education in China was a good foundation for me in terms of the understanding and transformation of images in reality — and also ways of observing it. The system in the U.S. is like the visualization of a philosophical system, it’s about ways to frame an image. There are pros and cons for both sides and it’s a little difficult to generalise too much from that.

HC: Could you describe your transition from painting to video making during this time? What was it about the video medium that pulled you away from painting?

YL: It began at “MICA Grad Lab”, where there was a lot of equipment you could check out and use for free — so it meant I didn’t have to go out and buy painting materials again, and I ended up shooting things more and more. Professor Timothy Druckrey was a very important influence to me. He was my MFA director, and a curator and writer in photography and media art. He used to say, “NO EASY SYMBOLISM”.

HC: Nice mantra. So it was your encounter with the media arts department at MICA that convinced you of the video medium?

YL: Yup I think so. The school gave me what I needed at that particular time. There were plenty of DVDs, lots of software, audio material or books to check out. With all of this, I found that I sort of liked observing myself through video footage. The program also brought over some special visiting artists too, which was cool. The undergraduate filmmaking class was good. It provided me with every step of 16mm film production and there was plenty of old film material lying around.

HC: Could you name a few artists that influenced you at the time of this transition to video and installation?

YL: Johan Grimonprez, Jan Svankmajer, Vito Acconci, Wassily Kandinsky, Ulf Langheinrich & Kurt Hentschlagel, Peter Weibel, Herwig Weiser, Maya Deren, John Waters, Shion Sono, Daito Manabe, Francis Bacon, Laibach, Nina Hagen, Leigh Bowery among others. At that point, painters and filmmakers were the major influences.

HC: The two early works included in the Magician Space exhibition were made during your time at MICA and Baltimore. There is an interesting treatment of space and geographical location in both videos — a conflation of disparate spaces into one montage space. For example, in *What up! Yefu* it toggles between U.S. and China and in *3013: A Space Love* virtual domestic space is intercut with actual public party scenes. Structurally, this conflated montage space continues throughout your work. Did your migratory background of living, studying, and making art in different countries and cities inform this treatment of space?

YL: At the very beginning there were these influences for sure. But later I found changes of geographical places wasn’t the main cause guiding how these different relationships form. Pretty much during my time in the U.S., I was mostly by myself. When you pass time alone you have to build up different ambiances for yourself.

So the work *What Up* was originally based on things in China that I discovered in Baltimore. The U.S. market still has plenty of things made from China, particularly in Baltimore, a city where there is a high proportion of black people, but also a low level of consumers. Places like 'Save-a-Lot' or Galaxy Mall are everywhere and jammed with commodities all with a shanzhai aesthetic. So that's why I invited an expert on shanzhai to do a little talk about this — as if it is all entirely logical.

The setting where shooting takes place for *3013* is a place called Belvedere Building. It's a pretty good hotel in Baltimore and in the early days they had works by Matisse stored in the top floor. I did the shooting there because it resonates with the luxurious room in the movie *American Psycho*. Another side was that I spent a lot of time meticulously going through different computer games with luxurious settings and rooms. Through this, I discovered how 'luxury rooms' have been projected in these different spaces. Adult movie scenes are another similar source of inspiration. I always try to find out what kind of room is used to shoot this kind of scene — the residential spaces for me are like different vessels and it's the vessel that give me all kinds of fantasies.

HC: In some way, does technology and its logic enable this type of spatial and material treatment, especially appropriation?

YL: At the beginning I didn't analyse things consciously too much in this way. It is closer to an instinctual reaction in relation to position and space. When you enter into a new environment, you feel curious even when there's not much there. Afterwards, you start to familiarise yourself and then it feels safer. I think external spaces are impossible to transform, their unchangeable, which is why I drag at or appropriate material instead.

HC: So when you talk about instinct as the initial creative impulse when using video as a tool, how would you describe what those instincts were? How did you want to use video as a new tool?

YL: This question makes me think about the love I have for performing and acting. If I can't perform or release my body then I feel uncomfortable. It's a bit like the brain and the heart need to speak out and have some kind of release. Performing helps with this release — it allows you to loosen up and conceal at the same time. For sure this type of performance isn't the kind that likes to directly face an audience. I like the idea that it's only the lens watching things and afterwards you can just marvel at it by yourself. This thrill from self-enjoyment, it's similar to the force you feel when a brush bounces as it hits the canvas — this is what painters get a kick from. Similarly, video combines with functions of recording, broadcasting, and viewing, then at the same time, you're allowed to modify things and share that around. Probably it's like the lens inadvertently making things feel closer to reality or sometimes making it seem more fictional.

HC: Interesting, in describing your influences, you then see a relationship between the paintbrush and the camera lens.

YL: Before when I was painting, I discovered that pleasure of mixing colors. It's also about the brush as it coerces the viscosity of the pigment. The way the brush stirs around the palette is the same joy you get chewing food. The bounce off the canvas is close to that pleasure when chewing your gum. The lens is like a brush; it gives me that similar pleasure.

HC: People usually associate technical mediation in a different space — that is not immediate but rather mediated and even detached. Are you thinking in terms of a digital sensoriality with your relationship to video?

YL: Maybe not completely like that. It is not at all serious, but there is that logic running on a fundamental level similar to what you are saying. How to say, it is more like going through the production of video in order to satisfy myself. Maybe you could say it is a form of narcissism? Because the process of shooting or screening can satisfy my mind and then allows me to have both states of observing and being observed to co-exist together. There is a sense of self-interest involved while I'm carrying out this process.

HC: I'm curious about how creative instinct can manifest the subconscious — this of course was a preoccupation of many art movements such as Surrealism or Actionism. I am interested in what is underneath. Looking at your earlier videos in the exhibition through the lens of instinct, technological mediation, and the subconscious, there are a few themes that seem to emerge for me that is evident: juxtaposition East/West, cross cultural influence (particularly materialism represented in luxury excesses and partying) and also the globalization of brutal spectacle. Can you talk more about this?

YL: This kind of 'instinct' is like a resistance. This resistance comes from being conscious to the processes of Western globalization. Also I feel disadvantaged from a physiological perspective compared to other races, similar to a defective weakness, which gives you a certain pressure. So this distortion always makes me feel it's like eating some kind of hallucinogen. Also I find objects such as these extravagant luxury items very interesting — people are always trying to find a material that gives them a sense of belonging. Possessing this object allows you to validate your existence. Dead people also have to find funeral objects to accompany them too. People that do shanzhai are the same as someone who helps improve a particular tool by refining it — they're doing the same thing by refining the original product. It's also an instinctual reaction to this original product, which has nothing to do with having a moral decision behind it. Also in *3013*, there's an instinctual reaction and

transformation happening to the original product shown via luxury items, parties, etc. The East and West for me is more like the geographic dispersion of different kinds of people. The Mongolians take up a part of the forest, the Nigerians take up a different part of the forest, and the Caucasians take another part of the forest. So really this so-called difference between East-West is really more like how someone from one part of the forests sees a new side to the forest. Partying is more like a ritual — we instinctively need to take part in them. Maybe all species with a collective trait are like this — I'm not sure.

HC: The way you make a metaphor between artist and shanzhai makers reminds me of the ubiquitous hover boards that were invented in Shenzhen. The industry there, which had been geared towards making shanzhai products, actually produced something new and popular in the West. Something novel emerged from these technologies and strategies of appropriation and straight copying.

YL: Shanzhai is also like gossip too. The gossip comes and goes around. Afterwards, the validity of the original information is not so important. You could say that it is the same with the work of an artist or any other worker too. Once you reach a particular discovery, afterwards your thoughts switch to continually changing or innovating — you shift this thing so it works for local situations. The hoverboards were like that too. Also shanzhai is a method of re-creation, happening on the levels of aesthetics and functionality. The identity I have within my works is also something like shanzhai. At the time, I was thinking how to construct an identity, one I could give to myself to work in a local situation. In that sense it was a failure, but then again the idea of not being able to acclimatize is kind of ok too.

HC: If the artist is perhaps equivalent to the country person making a Lamborghini — what does that say of the artist? Is he/she a mirror of the material world and production?

YL: I wouldn't say they're entirely equivalent, but maybe similar. Actually the place I think is most fun is the connection between original creator, the people making shanzhai, and the artist. Normally we say that the originator of an object is someone aesthetically conscious of constructing something right? Afterwards, you get people aesthetically and consciously unaware who then decide to re-create this thing. Then after that, the artist discovers them, which again makes the aesthetic differences between these objects come out more. At each level you can say that the artist is kind of one side to a mirror yes.

HC: LOL — with all this talk about instinct and reflexivity. Does this feel like art school crit where everything in your practice and work needs to be articulated?

YL: Haha yes. This is the doing of the educational system in relation to the artist — so despite this all sometimes you still need instincts to find your reasons. The

system makes a kind of aesthetic consciousness, but it's not like everyone has the opportunity to enter into this system — but that's also a good thing that happens too. There are some shanzhai products that have very little connection to aesthetic consciousness. They're merely functions embedded into a reconstruction — it is just like how I said before, it is a way to adapt to local requirements.

HC: Art school is where instincts go to die.

YL: Haha, whenever there's oppression there's resistance right?

HC: Speaking of the discursive framing of artistic practice. The gallery press release frames your work as being about analytical dissection and examination. This process of course requires a design that is once-removed from direct instinct we were just discussing. How can we reconcile these two narratives about your work?

YL: Dissection and examination are words I feel are adequate to summarize and describe my performance and writing. Dissection describes how I dispatch and give order to the images and material. It's also seeing how deep I can reach into things metaphorically. Examination is more like how I give myself a preposition for things (like organizing a role or position). Afterwards, through practice (performance, shooting, editing), I explore the rationality of a character — and then I examine whether this proposition can give rise to enough conflict or not.

HC: Perhaps in the instinctual construction of montage in your video work through appropriation, there emerges something analytical about technology and the images you choose?

YL: Normally I shoot a lot of material intuitively. I see things on the Internet and think of ways to download or capture video online to get hold of material. These places include Youtube, Facebook, public domain, Soundcloud, Vimeo, and also even Lynda, Criterion Collection, etc. Sometimes it could be copied from a friend's hard drive or from a few DVDs. In short, they are all things stored inside some equipment. A few months might pass and I'll think again about putting them together. In the beginning, there are few rules about editing or you could say it's a way to order a sequence. It might be directed by discovering a particular sound or narrative. Or maybe I want to make the sound myself and then put material back into an edit again that fits the sound. For example, an 'intense' sound appears so I will correspond that with an 'intense' image. Another situation might be that an absurd word from a narrative appears and there will be a reaction in the image. Because of this, it might appear that there is no logical connection there.

HC: I like these differing views of your work as something like a productive confusion. Have you noticed different interpretations of your work in China vs. U.S.? What about specific themes and interpretations that seem specific to Chinese and U.S. contexts? Does it reveal what people want to "read" into your work?

YL: Probably it's all a bit disordered. Most of the time, most people ask where a particular part is from. So actually from the beginning, people already start messing up what part is real or fake (shot or downloaded). Another thing that turns up a lot is the question of what 'theme' I'm expressing. These questions arise simply because the images are assembled together in an irregular way and it's difficult with the images to discern from my identity or find one narrative. Maybe a Chinese audience might ask why my work uses English in the narrative too. Like earlier how I mentioned before, normally I tell them English is like good food — chew it and the flavor comes out more, even with bad grammar. Also there's a side to English that's so theatrical and exaggerated. It really satisfies my urge to perform and mimic. In *What Up*, some people in the West commented that it wasn't just me replicating settings or products. There is also a continual replication of the West in itself — just like the process from Baroque painting to architecture in Las Vegas. *Ralph Rockefeller Jr.* (2015) and *York News* (2014) also touch on this. The Chinese audience is more interested in why I want to imitate Western people or how I'm able to remember their characteristics or body language. A Western audience might think more about what kind of person I am imitating from here. Maybe like this or that type of person, or maybe an image of Western trash. I guess an audience in China might read the work and see my performance as kind of eccentric; a Western audience might situate it as condemnation pointed to something.

HC: Regarding the group of videos made while you were in New York, which represents a body of work in another city in the U.S., how would you describe the developments and interests reflected in *York News* and *640 W 139th St.* (2014). What was your experience living as an artist in NYC and how did that affect your work?

YL: For me I see New York as a city like a climax to a party. It includes the unstoppable subway or renovated sidewalks that will never unify together. It's a body that never sleeps, which for me shows its destructive side too. You can probably use different words to describe different kinds of cities — and for New York it's clearly the word "climax". After living there a while, I found even the peacefulness of your own room is still a climax, because all around you hear helicopters, fire engines, or noises of ambulances — you can also perceive commotion from the two rivers and the Atlantic Ocean. Even the form of Manhattan Island looks like a genital — so you could say these two works finish off that image. The scenario of *York News* shares registers with what culminated in 9/11. Elsewhere, the loneliness from *640w* comes from a place not far away from and what reminds me of GG Allin's death.

HC: Oh man, GG Allin performed at my college my freshman year — he stuck a drumstick in his drummer's ass during the performance. Everyone who saw the show was traumatized for a week.

YL: Wow...haha. I would have liked to see him live.

HC: *York News* is narrated with an original text that overlays a voice over a montage that brings together different geographical locations and times. It seems like in this body of work you as an artist, body, and voice is more present than the earlier work. It is not as obscured by appropriated images, mediated image/sound, etc. Could you talk more about the narrative?

YL: When writing this narrative it came from an urge to imitate the speech of Caucasians. Like the crazy exaggerations of 'Babs' in *Pink Flamingos* or the calm insanity of Bateman in *American Psycho*, they were all reference points for me. So take the situation of a dirty homeless person, people normally don't pay much attention when they swear all the time. I frequently encounter these people in the subway and they are actually very interesting. I like observing them myself, but at the same time avoid encroaching them. This narrative was about trying to give a rational identity to swearing and the obscenities of the English language. Another way of seeing, is that I see swearing uselessly as a reflection of reality into the world just on the same level of something like Mozart's *K183 G minor*.

HC: Also, characteristic of your earlier videos, there is a similar treatment of different social and cultural spaces brought together, which often are seen as binaries (Uptown/Downtown, Native/Diasporic Chinese, East/West, rich/poor, international/local). Because New York is my home city, I was able to read these difference spaces as you edited the footage together.

YL: Around 2014, I started to hesitate between staying in the U.S. or going back. So my intention was to do something before leaving.

I think it's interesting that if you translate names of places here into Chinese. It gets really amusing like the Chinglish spoken over the announcements in the Beijing subway. The translation already makes the images of these places theatrical. Like with MoMA, Beijing has a place with the same name too. Then for example, a prostitute also brings a certain mood and can transform the name of a place into a site for hooking up — there's something ludicrous in that. Only when I start editing, it makes me think of the disjointed feeling you get reading a place name when it's translated literally into Chinese.

HC: For *York News*, can you talk about how you shot, collected, and edited this material?

YL: After I came to New York, I shot things all the time using my mobile, occasionally I might use 5D or gopro. The good thing about this equipment is that you can collect a lot of information quickly. The other thing is I believe people's eyes really don't require things in high-definition.

I was organizing things intuitively, which helped me discover the issues I've mentioned to become clearer. At the time, I went nearby to shoot with a lens using some green hair and there was also this narrative segment. Actually with this work, the rhythm and duration were laid together by following the sound. When the narrative was completed, I was still unsatisfied. So there was a moment in the scene when the screen turns off and some electronic music comes in. The ending with Titanic was shot while travelling around North Carolina. This scene blends a layer showing a warship in Norfolk Harbour, which was also taken on my travels. In order to make the ship seem like it's going forward, you can see artificial splashes of water created. There are really a lot of skillful techniques out there to trick people.

HC: Can you also describe your writing process for the narrator? There is such a particular voice and textual tone to these narrated videos.

YL: With *York News*, *What Up*, and *3013*, I asked my American friends who are just regular people. I told them what I was envisioning, and then showed some nasty videos I liked so that could relax and feel close to me. We talked about sex, selfies, love, race, etc. After 1 hr, I found out sex jokes are the best things to share when doing this. Finally, I put them into a single room to do the recording.

The narrative composition of *York News* is similar to other works. I follow a mood in English in order to write something. Afterwards, what I write goes back through a process of about three to four revisions. The first two rounds of editing focus on grammar. Then the last stages refine the mood and accuracy. I ask both Chinese and American friends to help at this point in the process. When it gets to the final stages, I normally follow my understanding of the mood, taking things out and making revisions.

The monologue for *York News* was originally intended for a black homeless person. But I quickly realized that the performance wasn't too interesting — it was from that character that it turned into a female character. I remember when we began recording sound, I had my friend listen to a song by Nina Hagen: *New York, New*

York. I was hoping to get a similar level of something exaggerated and unrestrained. Afterwards, I found that a lot of the choices made for narrative and sound actually came the reference material that I had used — a lot actually coming from the 70s and 80s.

HC: Is *640 W 139st* (2014) a portrait of your solitary experience working as an artist in NYC? Drinking red stripe — listening to Laibach — typing — Wikipediaing Bukowski — eating chips — wearing schoolgirl outfits?

YL: Ah yes. I need to make clear that the person shot in the video is also a friend of mine. This is what I did every day, as well as the girl — she was a student in SVA. She really enjoyed living in darkness at home. She told me about Bukowski and I introduced her to Laibach. I always feel there is some kind of inner connection amongst people like Laibach, Zizek, Bukowski and Fassbinder, etc. I also want to take about that more clearly — the everyday habits of Fassbinder; Zizek's saliva when it flies every time he speaks; or Bukowski drinking as he reads aloud — they all point to a common ground they all share. It's an infatuation towards something or a capacity they each have — I'm trying to link together the common denominator that connects them. My individual internal way of bridging these things needs to be disentangled from the unrelated relationships connected to their films, books, or poems by these people. The side I'm more interested in is more located in the behavior of these people: the expressions, the speed of their speech, or their body gestures.

HC: This video is interesting — it is much more cinematic and atmospheric compared to your other ones. Also, there is a focus on not only the technical construction of an image (i.e. the process of making video), but also the real life conditions and psychic space of artists.

YL: This video is more like a record. Actually, only scenes with the change of clothes and shoes are constructed. I shot this thing because the place where the girl lived was very small. She would often go home and only switch on that blue and pink light. She's really a 'Er-Ci-Yuan' person (a 2D person: someone obsessed with manga and gaming). Do you know that this kind of friend circle has a real constructed feeling about it? Eating gummy bears, red stripe beer, and potato chips are her friends. We would talk a lot together at that time. She would talk to me about Bukowski and recite these things to me. I think although the video is realistically shot, it is actually mapping out this idea of two dimensions (and also a hermit).

HC: For me there is an uncanny connection, as it is unclear if the woman in *139th Street* is actually you dressed as a woman — and because it's biographical it is essentially you. And for *York News*, there is you in drag in the park. Can you talk about how drag and gender ambivalence figures into your work?

YL: With *York News*, the reason for performing transgender is because I'm attracted to alternative views of heterosexuality. I've always viewed being straight as restrictive and not as comprehensive — and almost too harsh. There is frequently this consciousness to dominate someone. This desire to control other desires is the difference dividing sexes and at the same time it's a defect. So that's why I'm interested in experiencing different modes of thinking and acting between hetero and gay — this gives me a lot of help. *139th* is like a documentary designed for that girl. She had just broken up with someone at the time and we were talking about Fassbinder's *Love is Colder than Death*. The gender could be changed either way in my works. I sometimes don't like straight men because of the domination. Homosexual and transgender can be more sensitive to me. I feel gender can be more intellectual by touching both sides.

The 'green dog' in *York News* was a scenario I came up with by imagining a has-been prostitute who was also homeless. The reason was that this identity as a prostitute allowed me to write a narrative that could be extreme and dirty. I encountered a lot of these people in Baltimore and New York. Some were drug addicts; some were women standing on the streets — their figures and language so full of conviction. Similarly, there are countless scenes in American TV where things like this appear (including the prostitute that the character Pinkman finds in *Breaking Bad*). Actually all over the world, this kind of gender figure is really not strange anymore (maybe the outreach of U.S. images is really that powerful). So when a character like this appears, there is still a reaction that they are 'useless'. This idea of ordering use is a way of showing our own superiority — because for all the people that walk past these people, inside they probably have this feeling. I felt that strongly when in New York.

HC: This leads me to *Linda* (2016). Why *Linda* as title of the video?

YL: *Linda* comes from a moment in the Fassbinder film *Beware of a Holy Whore*. In the film, there is a film crew who are endlessly waiting for the director. It's a similar feeling when I was editing *Linda*. I felt maybe I was wasting my time, but also seemed like I had to do this. Actually, *Linda* is taken from a line with an air of frustration, which happens in the film — when they yell out for an actor.

HC: One element in this video is examining the "technical image" — how an image is constructed and its social history. This is similar to other videos where you look at technologies of image (flat screen, computer, editing). You talk about this in *Linda* through the lens of Western art history. Did you make this piece after your return to China?

YL: Yes exactly. This is why I made *Floating Point* (2015) in Shenzhen too. It's like training for totality and a way of giving up individuality of an artist to an art institution.

The introspection in the work comes from an analysis Jerry Saltz does in an art museum. In fact there's already four layers formed between the painting, Jerry, the audience and me. So maybe the audience will see these paintings, but at the same time will start hearing Jerry's breakdown. Then after hearing this, they then can re-examine the content of the original paintings. When I used to paint, I would mimic these particular kinds of painting. This way of mimicking became a form of worship and it was further ingrained into me through education. After Art College, seeing the originals, and by the time I heard Jerry's voice, I had already begun to overturn the framework of viewing these images with — I had already extended out to other fields. At the same time, I was operating on a different logic and gained a set of relationships different from simply acknowledging these historical images or striving to reach the level of these famous masters.

HC: Saltz presents a laughable narrative of modern art that frames artist and movements as battles. This sets up a structure to view the tension between different frameworks for art.

YL: Yes, especially when he talks about Matisse and Picasso

HC: You sent me an E-Flux article earlier, “From the Anxiety of Participation to the Process of De-Internationalization“ by Carol Yinghua Lu that spoke to this issue about Chinese art production in relation to the West. What about the article resonated with you?

YL: The article is a research in the processing of Chinese contemporary art and I was thinking about this text when conceiving this exhibition at Magician Space.

The most important word for me is “participant”. So actually originally, I wanted to choose the title “Assistant” to use for the show — similar to the situation of me as a Chinese artist ‘assisting’ the West in order to fill out their version of art history. This concept of participation is a very interesting idea of reality. I'm always suspicious of this passion to participate too. You can participate in the Olympics, participate in Venice Biennale, participate in a band, participate and give aid, participate in a war, or take part in a party. I'm attempting to respond to this invitation to clarify clearly what it means to ‘participate’ and also to understand myself more about the causes of why I want to work in this way. We want to play with the West, even if it means being an assistant. We donate value to the West for free. I

know it's not free, but seems like we're partying at the same time. So that is why I think Ma Yun is the real soldier. Not any artist. Haha. But Jack Ma.

HC: Haha — that is why partying is such a continuing theme in your videos right? And in the most extreme, the genre of porn that takes place at parties.

YL: Ah yes.

HC: Is partying for you about a type of profanity related to culture or materialism? Or some kind of celebration?

YL: A party is like destruction; it is also like a theatrical setting for worship or a ceremony that goes to the limits. Nightclubs, the Titanic, art fairs, concentration camps, graveyards, the discounted commodities of a Carrefour super market in China, discounts at Walmart, the end of year party at a company, award ceremonies, etc., for me they are all like parties.

HC: So partying represents more a space where there is a flattening in which "villains" and "heroes" are entangled — where morality and ethics are full of contradictions — which also includes the space of East/West? They are in a sense "interpenetrated" — like the porn party scenes?

YL: Um yes. Totally. I think the party will never be related to a morality from any side. There's a neutral intersection between suicide and nightclub, the scene of 9/11. These are scenes culminated after a party.

HC: The e-flux article discusses the emergence of a type of independence in art making that feels less dependent/responsive to Western art history, discourse, and markets. Do you think this is true? If so, what does this represent to you as a working artist — one that is Chinese with American art training. Is there a new freedom?

YL: 50/50, I think. it's hard to say. Perhaps a fashionable stance would be that you can be independent from Western art history — despite this, you can say that the canonisation of art history is still written by the West. Just because you can produce art in a place doesn't mean it also has the capacity to write its own history.

In the event of participating in something, there will be different degrees of responsibility tied the situation — but it's not certain whether you can meet those

obligations. I think this is where the contradiction lies and also is the place that is most interesting. It reaches an interesting area such as the changes of a city I live in, changes in reference material, changes in the language of narration, or changes to the audience, etc. Even if 'globalization' is neither a new topic nor does a 'resistance to Western globalization need to be done so overtly done. But to preserve the fluidity of life and break from the encroachment into ways of working — maybe these things will help my work be more effective from now on.

HC: What do you see as the discursive and artistic possibilities in this independence?

YL: Firstly, from my perspective I think there is no real difference working in China. Maybe more can be said about more resources here that can be exploited, but a flipside is also less accessible information to get. So it's actually an interesting contradiction. Another side is still only a small minority of people really engage 'contemporary art'. The subjective interest of this small group directly influences the direction contemporary art takes in China. It is precisely because of this one-sidedness that making work here is interesting. I want to resonate with different modes of thinking. Actually I'm even clearer about what I want to do for myself when I'm in China. Secondly, I think perhaps that making work in China actually makes me pay more attention towards things happening outside too.

HC: For the exhibition *Episode 1* at Magician space, what is the concept behind the selection of works? How did you decide on the installation?

YL: Firstly, because these five works were completed at different times and places — it certainly spans quite a lot. Another aspect is that these work are mainly realistically shot or found material that has been spliced together. So it was during *640w* that we then also chose to put *3013* next to it. This work is completely shot pretty much unadulterated, but the angles of its identity actually come from a fictional experience — that is why it has that connection to *3013*. She is like the anybody that Sasha Grey represents. Also with *What Up* and *York News* the screens a relatively small, the images are also chaotic so we were also thinking about ways of display that would not interfere the text with the image. In the end we decided to place the translation as a printed text close to the work — it also added another layer of reading the work. *Linda* is the newest work, there's also a kind of ridiculousness that exists within the composition, but it also lacks a concrete character that you can reference too — so this work was enclosed in a separate room. These different works also mimic long — distance or close-up ways of viewing an image.

HC: What next?

YL: The End

Howie Chen

Howie Chen is a New York-based curator engaged in collaborative art production and research. Chen's curatorial and institutional work includes the Whitney Museum of American Art (2001-2007) and MoMA PS1. He is a founder of Dispatch, a NYC curatorial production office and project space that has presented over thirty national and international exhibitions, projects and special events since 2007. In 2003, with artist Mika Tajima, he formed New Humans, a moniker for collaborations with musicians, artists and designers that was included in the 2008 Whitney Biennial and has more recently undertaken projects at SFMOMA and South London Gallery. Collaborators have included Vito Acconci, Charles Atlas, and Judith Butler among others.

Yefu Liu



Liu Yefu

- 2014 Kala Art Institute, Artist in Residency, Berkeley, CA, USA
MFA in Photographic and Electronic Media, Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, MD, USA
- 2012 Post-Baccalaureate in Fine Art, Maryland Institute College of Art, Baltimore, MD, USA
- 2009 BA in Painting, Capital Normal University, Beijing, CN

Solo Exhibition

- 2016 *Episode 1*, Magician Space, Beijing, CN

Group Exhibitions

- 2016 *HISTORICODE: Scarcity & Supply, The 3rd Nanjing International Art Festival*, Baijiahu Art Musrum, Nanjing, CN
OverPop, Yuz Museum Shanghai, Shanghai, CN
Floating, curated by Fuca Yuan, Post Mountain, Beijing, CN
Lost in Shenzhen, curated by Jiu Society & Steller Course, Shenzhen, CN
- 2015 *No Dice (I)*, curated by Howie Chen, Kimberly-Klark, NY
S/K, a Play by Tingying Ma, Pershing Square Signature Theatre, New York, NY, USA
- 2014 *Sludge Jam*, curated by CJ Brazelton, M I N T, Columbus, OH, USA
VOX X: Present Tense, curated by Howie Chen and Matthew Brannon, Vox Populi, Philadelphia, PA, USA
MICA MFA Thesis Show, Decker Gallery, Baltimore, MD, USA

- 2013 *MFA Photographic and Electronic Media Fall Show*, Sheila & Richard Riggs and Leidy Galleries, Baltimore, MD, USA
 First Year MFA Juried Show, Juried by Adelina Vlas, Fox3 Gallery, Baltimore, MD, USA
- 2012 *MFA Photographic and Electric Media Fall Show*, Fox3 Gallery, Baltimore, USA
 Post-Baccalaureate Exhibition, MICA Fox3 Gallery, Baltimore, USA
 MICA Commencement Show, BBOX, Gateway, Baltimore, USA
- 2009 *BA Thesis show*, CNU Museum, Beijing, CN

Awards

- 2014 Finalist Toby Devan Lewis MFA Fellowship
- 2012-2014 MICA Photographic and Electronic Media Fellowship
- 2011-2012 MICA Post-Baccalaureate in Fine Art Fellowship

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