

Is the World Your Friend ?

Isaac Chong Wai

29.1.2019 – 9.3.2019

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

“Is the World Your Friend?” by Isaac Chong Wai

29 January – 9 March 2019

Opening Reception: 26 January 2019, Saturday, 4 – 6:30pm

Artist will be present.

Performance will take place from 4:30 to 5:00pm.

Venue: Blindspot Gallery (15/F, Po Chai Industrial Building, 28 Wong Chuk Hang Road, Wong Chuk Hang, Hong Kong)

Opening Hours: Tuesday to Saturday, 10am to 6pm (Sunday and Monday by appointment only); closed on public holidays

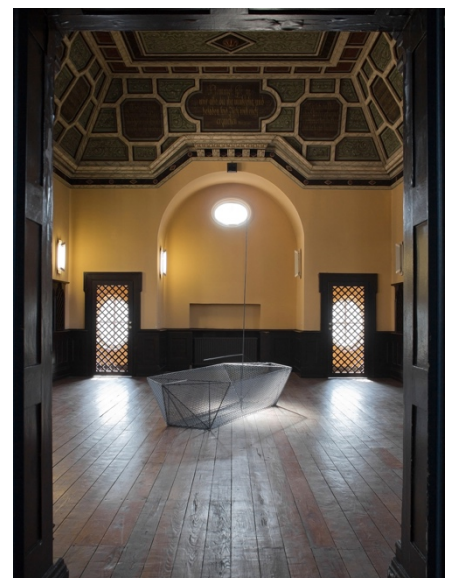


Isaac Chong Wai’s solo exhibition “Is the World Your Friend?” begins with the artist’s personal experience of being attacked by a stranger on the street of Berlin. With performance at the heart of his practice, the Berlin-based Hong Kong artist investigates how his actions could mediate trauma, intervene in violence, and even exercise reconciliation. The projects presented are made between 2013 and 2019, and address a breadth of related themes, including incarceration, border, victimization, oppression, and politics of space. “Is the World Your Friend?” articulates an almost naïve yet polarizing problem that permeates our personal lives and contemporary political discourse. Where we stand in the friendliness scale affects our views on immigration, multiculturalism, justice, and punishment. It is at once a rethinking of intangible relationality, a distillation of invisible violence, and an open-ended question that yields inconvenient responses.

Isaac Chong Wai was attacked in November 2015 on the street of Berlin, the city he lives in. A stranger started a conversation with him, but abruptly hurled racial insults and then bludgeoned his head with a glass bottle. The artist took this self-portrait as evidence of his injuries. A friend later cautioned him that “the world is not your friend.” In resistance to the definitive pessimism in his friend’s advice, the artist turns the negation into an inquisitive question.

In another work based on personal experience, *I Dated a Guy in Buchenwald* (2013), the artist asks his date François to write about their date at the Nazi German concentration camp. The resulting text is an affirmation of the goodness and warmth of humanity, a redemptive contrast from the horror of the camp and the hate crime the artist suffered later.

Incorporating works from 2013 to 2019, the ensemble can be loosely divided into four related themes: Prison, Borders, Reconciliation, and International Waters. In the Prison Project, the artist made a life-size boat out of segments of wire fences he cut out from a prison in Weimar. While the boat is made out of penetrable metal fences and is thus futile as a transportation vessel, the artist dragged it across the city of Weimar back to the prison, charting a fictional path between geographical mobility and escapist fantasy. In *Haribo Wall – Gold (Under Construction)* (2017-2019), the transmutation of barrier-making parts takes a systematic breakthrough. By making solid blocks with a few hundred kilograms of Haribo Goldbären gummy bear candy, the artist invents a new material for brick making, thus wall building and boundary setting. This new material is sweet and recalls childhood palate, but durable, sticky, resistant to change and hard to dismantle. The bricks represent a uniquely soft power, evident in the mass-market distribution and global ubiquity of the



German candy. They paradoxically embody a powerful penetrability and accessibility that even the hardest borders cannot stop.

Some boundaries take mobile and animate forms, like the policemen who move across the urban landscape countering the movements of protesters. In *Rehearsal of the Futures: Police Training Exercises* (2018), Chong choreographs the movement of uniformed riot police in a tortuously slow motion, imbuing their originally violent intentions with a paradoxical gentleness and beauty. These decelerated actions visualise the slow violence inflicted upon individuals by the collective power structures. This work was commissioned by M+ as part of "M+ Live Art: Audience as Performer" (2018).



In *A selfie that celebrated a murder incident in the no man's land* (2019), Chong takes this temporal manipulation to a dysfunctional halt. Citing a video leaked online about a brutal killing of anonymous men in the open sea, the artist screen-captured 91 consecutive still frames at the end of the video, when the perpetrators celebrated the incident by taking selfies with each other. These pixelated still images are laser-etched into separate glass blocks and displayed chronologically, like a row of memorials. Cast in a material reserved for awards, achievements and anniversaries, the



blocks amplify the celebratory mood of the selfie-takers, which complicates the narrative of that they are mere cold-blooded killers devoid of contexts and feelings. From his own selfie as a victim to the selfies of others as attackers, the artist turns his gaze from himself to the assailants, pitting himself against the evasion of justice, the lawlessness of international waters, and the banality of taking a selfie.

The artist will be present at the opening reception. Interviews are welcome and can be arranged.

About Isaac Chong Wai (b. 1990, Guangdong province, China)

Isaac Chong Wai graduated from the Academy of Visual Arts at Hong Kong Baptist University with a BA in Visual Arts in 2012, and the Bauhaus-Universität in Weimar, Germany, with a MFA in Public Art and New Artistic Strategies in 2016. Chong works with diverse media, including performance, site-specific installation, public art, video, photography and multimedia. He transforms the tensions, intervention and interactions of human bodies into a microcosm of human relationality in social systems. Influenced by personal events and global phenomena, he engages themes of collectivism and individualism, politics of time and space, border, migration, war, identity politics, LGBTQ, public sphere and human rights.

His recent solo exhibition includes "Chapter A: The Rehearsal of the Futures" (Apartment der Kunst, Munich, Germany, 2018), "Chapter B: An Artistic Archive of Borders" (Kunstraum München, Munich, Germany, 2018), and "What is the future in the past? And what is the past in the future?" (Bauhaus Museum, Weimar, Germany, 2016). In 2018, Chong was commissioned by M+ to produce the performance work *Rehearsal of the Futures: Police Training Exercises*. His recent group exhibitions include "The D-Tale: Video Art from the Pearl River Delta" (Time Art Center, Berlin, Germany, 2018), "BERLIN MASTERS" (Stiftung Brandenburger Tor, Berlin, Germany, 2017), and "Forecast Forum" (Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, Germany, 2017). Chong currently lives and works in Berlin, Germany and Hong Kong.

About Blindspot Gallery

Set up in 2010, Blindspot Gallery is a Hong Kong-based contemporary art gallery. The gallery began with a primary focus on contemporary photography and image-based art, and has evolved to include diverse media in contemporary art. The gallery represents both emerging and established artists, mainly from Hong Kong and the region but also beyond.

For enquiries and media interviews, please contact Ms. Lesley Kwok at 2517 6238 or by email info@blindspotgallery.com

Image captions:

Isaac Chong Wai, *Self Portrait: the evening when I was beaten up by a stranger with a glass bottle*, 2015, Archival inkjet print, 40 x 27 cm, Edition of 5+2AP

Isaac Chong Wai, *I Made a Boat in Prison – A Journey to the Shore*, 2015, Archival inkjet print, 80 x 60 x 5 cm, Edition of 5+2AP

Isaac Chong Wai, *Haribo Wall – Gold (Under Construction)*, 2017-2019, Haribo gummy bears, 12 x 24 x 5 cm (each), installation size variable

Isaac Chong Wai, *Rehearsal of the Futures: Police Training Exercise*, 2018, Dual-channel Video, 18'02", Edition of 5+2AP

(Image courtesy of artist and Blindspot Gallery)

Supported by:



Installation shots



Installation shots





Self Portrait: The evening when I was beaten up by a stranger with a glass bottle

2015

Archival inkjet print

Image size: 40 x 27 cm

Framed size: 50.5 x 34.1 x 2.5 cm

Edition of 5 + 2AP



IS THE
WORLD
YOUR
FRIEND?

Question #2: Is the World Your Friend?

2018

Acrylic on canvas

160 x 120 cm

Exhibition history:

"Transcultural Transcience", ACUD Galerie, Berlin, Germany, 2018



International Waters

2017

Pen on paper, wooden frame

Paper size: 32 x 24 cm

Framed size: 40 x 32.2 x 2.8 cm

Exhibition history:

"Chapter B: An Artistic Archive of Borders", Kunstraum München, Munich, Germany, 2018



A selfie that celebrated a murder incident in the no man's land

2019

Laser etching on glass, set of 91

Installation size: 655 (L) x 133.8 (H) x 38 (W) cm

Glass block: 13.8 x 17.8 x 2 cm (each)



(Details)



I Made a Boat in Prison - A Journey to the Shore

2015

Archival inkjet print

Image size: 80 x 60 cm

Framed size: 80.5 x 60.5 x 3.5 cm

Edition of 5 + 2AP

Exhibition history:

"Chapter B: An Artistic Archive of Borders", Kunstraum München, Munich, Germany, 2018



(Film still)

I Made a Boat in Prison - A Walk in Weimar

2015

Single-channel video

8'26"

Edition of 5 + 2AP

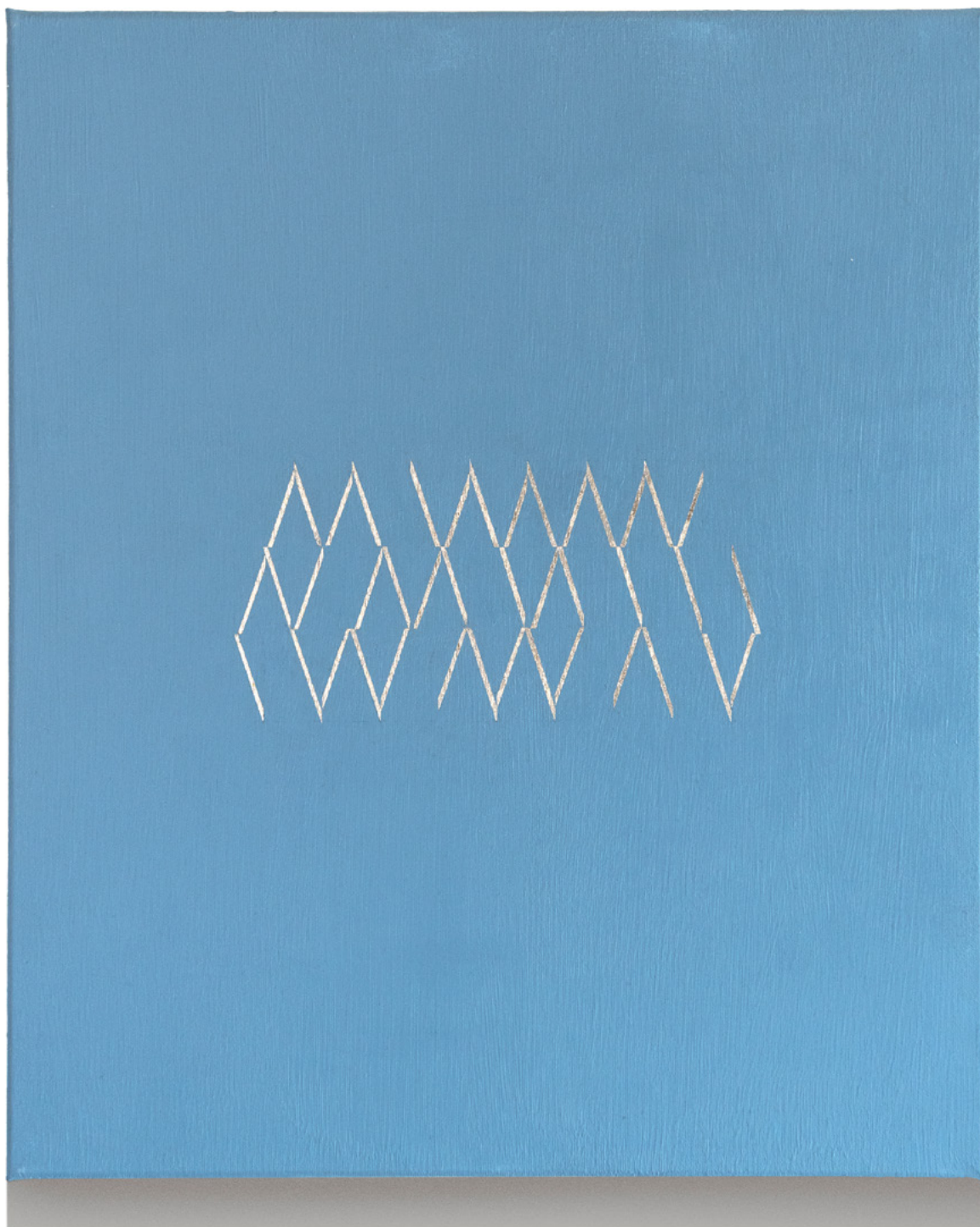
Exhibition history:

"Chapter B: An Artistic Archive of Borders", Kunstraum München, Munich, Germany, 2018

"L'homme et la Mer", Serlachius Museum, Mänttä, Finland, 2017



(Film stills)



42 lines in silver

2018

Silver leaf and acrylic on canvas

60 x 50 cm



48 lines in aluminium
2018
Aluminium and acrylic on canvas
60 x 50 cm



50 lines in silver

2018

Silver leaf and acrylic on canvas

60 x 50 cm



308 lines in blue

2018

Acrylic on canvas

80 x 120 cm

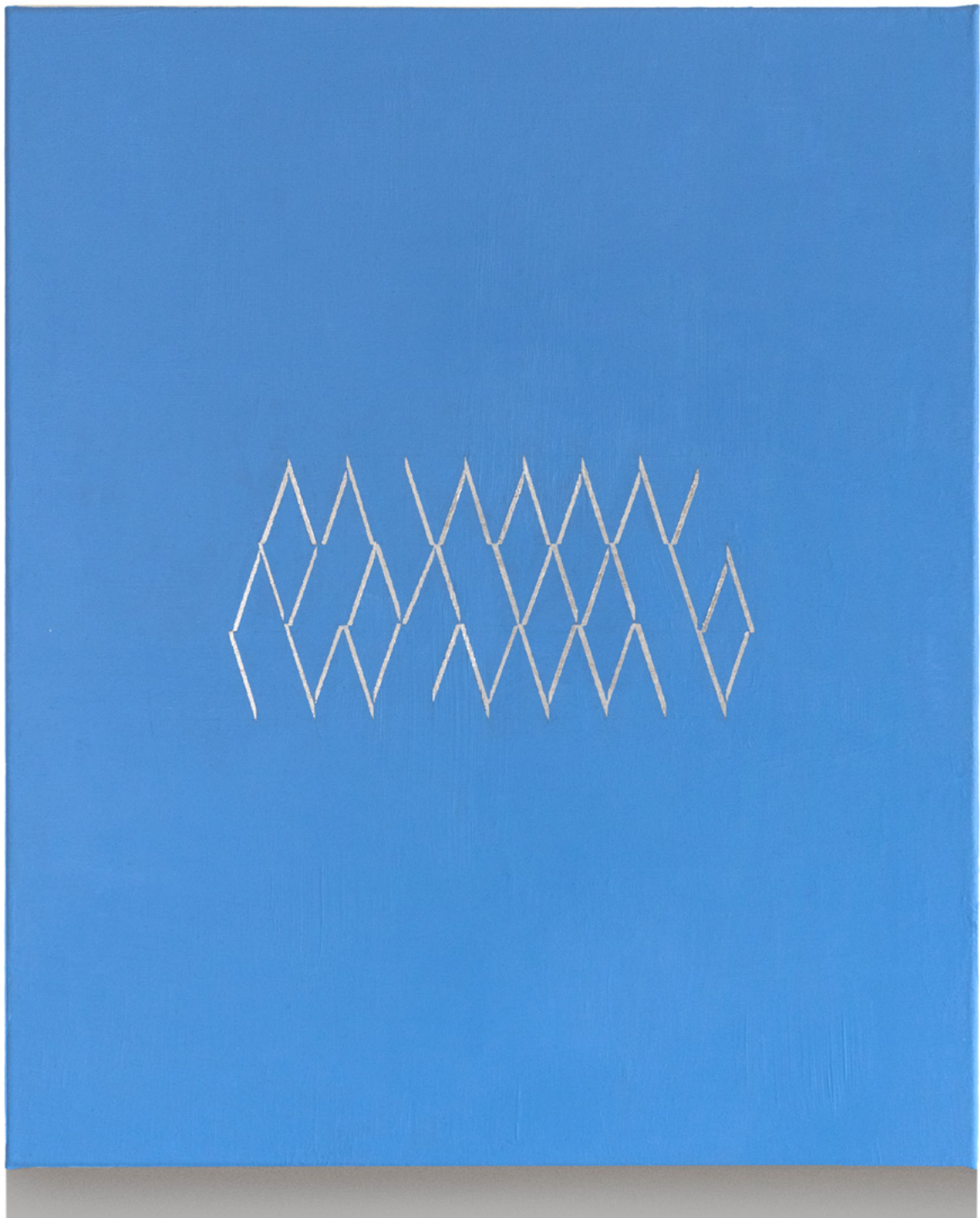


46 lines in silver

2018

Silver leaf and acrylic on canvas

60 x 50 cm



44 lines in aluminium

2018

Aluminium and acrylic on canvas

60 x 50 cm



(Film still)

Rehearsal of the Futures: Police Training Exercises

2018

Synchronised HD two-channel video

18'02"

Edition of 5 + 2AP

Exhibition history:

Performance: "M+ Live Art: Audience as Performer", Goethe-Institut, Hong Kong, 2018

"The D-Tale: Video Art from the Pearl River Delta", Times Art Center, Berlin, Germany, 2018



(Film still)



(Film still)

The Silent Wall

2014

HD single-channel video

10'43"

Edition of 5 + 2AP

Exhibition history:

"Chapter B: An Artistic Archive of Borders", Kunstraum München, Munich, Germany, 2018

"Have You Ever Measured the Reality?", Das Weisse Haus, Vienna, Austria, 2017

"Near and Far 1914-1918 Events, History, Memory", Macura Museum, Serbia, 2015

"The Quiet Land", Vitrine Gallery, Weimar, Germany, 2014

Award:

Hong Kong Human Rights Art Prize, 1st runner up, 2017



(Film still)



I Dated a Guy in Buchenwald

2013

Text on paper, wooden frame, caption

Framed size: 30.2 x 26.2 x 2.7cm

Edition of 6 + AP

"I had lost faith in mankind. One day, I decided to go to Buchenwald with this guy and once inside the camp, he kissed me and helped me to find the oak tree. Then I knew there was hope for I had just experienced human warmth where I least expected to." — François

Exhibition history:

"Future of The Past – Past of The Future: Creating Time in Public Space Through Performance", Goethe-Institut, Hong Kong, 2018

"BERLIN MASTERS – TOY AWARD", Stiftung Brandenburger Tor, Berlin, Germany, 2017

"What is the future in the past? And what is the past in the future?", Bauhaus Museum, Weimar, Germany, 2016

"A Time for Dreams", Moscow International Biennale for Young Art, National Centre for Contemporary Arts, Moscow Museum of Modern Art and Museum of Moscow, Moscow, Russia, 2014



Haribo Wall - Gold (Under Construction)

2017–2019

Haribo gummy bear

Installation size variable

Block A: 12 x 24 x 5 cm (each)

Block B: 12 x 12 x 5 cm (each)

Exhibition history:

"Chapter B: An Artistic Archive of Borders", Kunstraum München, Munich, Germany, 2018

"BERLIN MASTERS – TOY AWARD", Stiftung Brandenburger Tor, Berlin, Germany, 2017



[Details]

Artist Biography

Born in 1990 in Guangdong, China, Isaac Chong Wai graduated from the Academy of Visual Arts at Hong Kong Baptist University with a BA in Visual Arts in 2012, and the Bauhaus-Universität in Weimar, Germany, with a MFA in Public Art and New Artistic Strategies in 2016. Chong works with diverse media, including performance, site-specific installation, public art, video, photography and multimedia. He transforms the tensions, intervention and interactions of human bodies into a microcosm of human relationality in social systems. Influenced by personal events and global phenomena, he engages themes of collectivism and individualism, politics of time and space, border, migration, war, militarism, racism, identity politics, LGBTQ, public sphere and human rights.

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Chong currently lives and works in Berlin, Germany and Hong Kong.

Artist CV

Solo Exhibitions

- 2019 "Is the World Your Friend?", Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong
- 2018 "Chapter B: An Artistic Archive of Borders", Kunstraum München, Munich, Germany
 "Chapter A: The Rehearsal of the Futures", Apartment der Kunst, Munich, Germany
 "Future of The Past – Past of The Future: Creating Time in Public Space Through Performance",
 Goethe-Institut, Hong Kong
- 2017 "L'Homme et la Mer", Serlachius Residency by Serlachius Museum and Mänttä Art Festival,
 Mänttä, Finland
- 2016 "What is the future in the past? And what is the past in the future?" Bauhaus Museum,
 Weimar, Germany
- 2011 "An Unknown Artist – Chong Wai Solo Exhibition", Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong

Group Exhibitions and Screenings

- 2018 "The D-Tale: Video Art from the Pearl River Delta", Times Art Center, Berlin, Germany
 "Kotodama", Para Site, Hong Kong
 "M+ Live Art: Audience as Performer", Goethe-Institut, Hong Kong
 "The Collective Individual Exercises", SPRING Festival, Utrecht, the Netherlands
 "Freiraum", Kanuti Gildi SAAL and Goethe-Institut, Tallinn, Estonia
 "Transcultural Transience", ACUD Galerie, Berlin, Germany
- 2017 "Urban Nomadism: 2017 Hangzhou Liangzhu Big Rooftop Moving Image Exhibition", Liangzhu
 Culture and Art Center, Hangzhou, China
 "Tale of the Wonderland", Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong
 "BERLIN MASTERS – TOY AWARD", Stiftung Brandenburger Tor, Berlin, Germany
 The 3rd Berliner Herbst Salon, Maxim Gorki Theater, Kronprinzenpalais, Berlin, Germany
 "Forecast Forum," Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, Germany
 "Carnival," Amnesty International Hong Kong, Hong Kong
 "Have You Ever Measured the Reality?", Das Weisse Haus, Vienna, Austria
- 2016 "The 5th Large-Scale Public Media Arts Exhibition – 'Human Vibrations'", Kai Tak Runway Park,
 Hong Kong; May 18 Democracy Square, Gwangju, Korea; K11 Artist Village, Wuhan, China
 "Gwangju Media Art Festival", Gwangju, Korea
 "Faith and Terror – Performance Art Festival", Meinblau, Berlin, Germany
 "WECHSELRAUM", Deutsche Künstlerbund, Berlin, Germany
 "Going Somewhere at ZK/U /// Ortstermin Moabit", Ortstermin - Kunstverein Tiergarten, ZK/U,
 Berlin, Germany
 "Touch the Reality – Rethinking the Keywords of Political Performance", Kunstraum
 Niederösterreich, Vienna, Austria

"SHIFT: AVA 10th Anniversary Exhibition", Academy of Visual Arts, Baptist University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

- 2015 "The Human Body: Measure and Norms", Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong
 "FLUCHTPUNKTE", ACC Galerie Weimar, Weimar, Germany
 "Near and Far 1914-1918 Events, History, Memory", Macura Museum, Serbia
 "Acting Space - Bauhaus Goes Kunstfest '15", Kunstfest, Weimar, Germany
 "Imaginary Bauhaus Museum, the second Berliner Herbstsalon 'Flucht'", Maxim Gorki Theater, Berlin, Germany
 "Montag Modus #4: 'Transgression/Creation'", CHB Collegium Hungaricum, Berlin, Germany

- 2014 "A Time for Dreams", Moscow International Biennale for Young Art, National Centre for Contemporary Arts (NCCA), Moscow Museum of Modern Art (MMOMA) and Museum of Moscow, Moscow, Russia
 "Works on Paper II", Momentum Worldwide, Berlin, Germany
 "La quema de tiempo. Muestra de video del colectivo La Decanatura", Plataforma Bogotá, Bogota, Colombia
 "Illuminate the Darkness", Viehauktionshalle, Weimar, Germany
 "The Quiet Land", Vitrine Gallery, Weimar, Germany

- 2013 "The 2nd OZON International Video Art Festival", Rondo Sztuki Gallery, Katowice, Poland
 "Walk of Art: 20th Anniversary of Art and Design Faculty", Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, Weimar, Germany
 "Bodied Spaces be/verkörperte Räume", Collective Patty & Britty; ART CLAIMS IMPULSE, Berlin, Germany
 "TRAVA(l)l", The A.lift Gallery, Hong Kong

- 2012 "Haptic InterFace", Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong
 "Fresh Trend 2012", 1a space, Hong Kong
 "Discordia", 10 Chancery Lane Gallery, Hong Kong
 "OSTRALE'012: International Exhibition of Contemporary Arts", IAM international art moves, Dresden, Germany
 "Cabinet of Curiosity", Hong Kong Contemporary, The Park Lane Hong Kong, Hong Kong
 "Home Grown", Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong
 "Shine: HKBU Christian Student 2nd Art Exhibition", Hong Kong Baptist University, Hong Kong

- 2011 "Point to Point Art Exhibition", Hong Kong Youth Arts Foundation, Hong Kong

Awards

- 2017 Hong Kong Human Rights Art Prize – First Runner-up
- 2016 Best ART-UNI-ON Artist Award
- 2015 Bauhaus-Universität Weimar - Bauhaus Essentials Award
- 2014 Bauhaus-Universität Weimar - Bauhaus Essentials Award
- 2013 2nd OZON International Video Arts Festival - Honorable Mention



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