

Optimized Heart: David Douard / Liu Shiyuan

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Location:

UCCA Dune

Media Contact:

Danyu Xu

Deputy Director of Communications

+86 10 5780 0258

+86 138 1082 9590

danyu.xu@ucca.org.cn

Press material available at

ucca.org.cn/en/press

Featuring more than 30 artworks across a wide variety of media by artists David Douard and Liu Shiyuan, “Optimized Heart” examines how globalization and technological advances have encroached upon humanity’s heart and soul.

Exploring how art might help us reconstruct a shared ecology, the exhibition encourages viewers to reflect on the current state of individual existence.

Beidaihe, CHINA — From March 26 to June 25, 2023, UCCA Dune presents “Optimized Heart,” a dual solo exhibition by David Douard (b. 1983, Perpignan, France) and Liu Shiyuan (b. 1985, Beijing). Through more than 30 multimedia works that span drawing, photography, video, sculpture, and installation, this exhibition invites the artists to discover the heretofore unexplored connections and shared inspirations that link their respective creative frameworks. “Optimized Heart” features recent pieces by both artists, including some commissioned by UCCA and being shown to the public for first time, as well as earlier representative works. Although Douard and Liu come from different backgrounds and operate in different creative territories, both of them use multimedia artworks as a means to express their personal perceptions of and insights into the state of the contemporary world, fostering reflection on how individuals may free their minds from the constraints of “self-optimization” and “psychopolitics.” “Optimized Heart: David Douard / Liu Shiyuan” is curated by UCCA Curator Yan Fang.

In the new material politics of the post-pandemic era, humans exist in a symbiotic relationship with all the other ecological participants of this crowded planet. New technologies and globalized, online social lives are constantly transforming the ways we think, feel, and communicate. As people, society, and non-human life overlap and evolve together at an accelerated pace, we must address the crises in our increasingly more complex living environments and the mechanisms of our behavioral control and emotional alienation. As new technologies depart from their original intended uses, they have begun to assume a more dominant role in society, obsessively pursuing rationality and optimization. In parallel, the logic of personal optimization has embedded itself into the contemporary mind, throwing exhausted human lives into a precarious, naked state. However, this craze for and internalization of self-optimization, a contemporary technology of governance that Byung-Chul Han has dubbed “psychopolitics,” does not directly control the individual as a mode of

exploitation. Rather, these psychopolitics are already lodged deep in our emotions, stabilizing and maintaining current systems through psychological programming, and leading individuals to extract happiness and achievement from willing self-exploitation. By internalizing power relations, the subject enacts their own subjugation. In this urgent moment, there is a pressing need to build a new ecology that is wiser and more altruistic—not necessarily the most optimized. How might we disarm psychopolitics? Can we discover a new technological ecosystem built upon an awareness of the interconnectedness of all things, one that departs from the myth of anthropocentrism and realizes a more-than-human life? Might art be capable of rescuing contemporary society from its worship of optimization and allowing new forms of life to emerge from the ashes?

This discourse forms the context for the artworks of David Douard and Liu Shiyuan. Though they have never worked together before, and they come from very different backgrounds, their art represents an exploration—albeit one that takes on different forms—of this topic and its significance from the individual to the universal. Closely associated with the Post-Internet art movement, French artist Douard often sources materials from the networked world and anonymous members of the public, working with sound, video, poetry, and text from everyday life. Exploring the relationship between user and machine, and its complex and protean collective emotions, he employs sculpture and video installations to create a fluid social space and imagine potentials of resistance. Commissioned by UCCA, Douard's new installation *O't'kappa* (2022) stands like an all-seeing monster in the center of urban life, its apocalyptic aesthetic connecting reality and the dark web. It chews up and spits out all the hidden, lowly things of this mortal plane, out of which grows a tender and beautiful “flower of evil” that castigates the real world. In the installation *Canary feel it* (2022), the half-beast, half-cage form recalls the figure of a masked animal trainer, which frequently appeared in the artist's early works. It marches forward unimpeded, but its mission is also its cage—the paradox of modern human existence. Douard's distinctive formal language reflects an incisive understanding of the ongoing corruption of the human world. He injects the energy of Fluxus art, underground culture, hacktivism, and other movements into his fluid aluminum forms, resulting in artworks that resonate like an otherworldly melody, heralding a return to a new nature within the eternal molding of the self.

Similarly, Liu Shiyuan considers the complex ethical questions posed by a globalized world. Through her image-based drawings, photographic collages, videos, and

installation works, she interrogates the impact of consumer culture as well as how constantly changing technology infiltrates private spaces, voicing a serious concern for the fate of humanity. In the new UCCA-commissioned video installation *Green Blanket Dream* (2023), dream-like scenes depict how individual lives and the world as a whole pulse in sync. From a feminist perspective, Liu tells of the mutual emotional care between humans and their environment. Meanwhile, *From Whatever to Happiness* (2023), a site-specific collaboration between Liu and Kristian Mondrup Nielsen, activates the museum space as a new context—through an imaginary forest habitat, they offer the viewer a meditative space.

“Optimized Heart” represents a hard look at the contemporary world through an interdisciplinary understanding of the hidden commonalities and connections between the two artists’ modes of thought. The exhibition invites the viewer to consider how the transmission of information, consumption of images, and control of the digital world shape perception and emotion in social life, reflecting on the shape of the earthly forms we rely upon for survival.

Support and Sponsorship

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Public Programs

Throughout the exhibition period, UCCA’s Public Practice department will present an array of enriching public programs, including two online dialogues, a video art screening, and a contact improvisation workshop. The two online discussions will dive into the creative thinking of the two artists, exploring how they subtly capture individual emotions and how one might resist their environment within a society shaped by rapid advances in technology. For the video art event, Liu Shiyuan will share a selection of her video works and join curators, critics, and art film directors to discuss how deconstructed, heavily edited image-based narratives may be able to expand the boundaries of knowledge, breaking through outmoded norms and ways of perceiving. Finally, the contact improvisation workshop will invite audiences to take a

break and interact with the art in the museum's first gallery space, drawing upon physical improvisation and the reading of personal stories.

About the Artists

David Douard

David Douard (b. 1983, Perpignan) lives and works in Aubervilliers, France. He graduated from the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris in 2011, and now teaches at the École nationale supérieure d'arts de Paris Cergy. Language is the very basis of David Douard's work. The texts and poems he collects on the Internet are manipulated and transformed in order to become a vital flow, feeding into his sculptures. With language as an ingredient, David Douard redefines space as hybrid and collective by injecting anonymous, chaotic, deviant, ill, and frustrating poems in it. As he recreates an infected environment where the real world used to be, the fantasy brought about by new digital technologies expands.

His major solo exhibitions include "O'Ti'Lulabies" (Serralves Museum, Porto, 2022); "O' Ti' Lulaby" (FRAC Île-de-France, Paris, 2020); "blindfold" (KURA. c/o Fonderia Artistica Battaglia, Milan, 2018); "Horses" (Kunstverein Braunschweig, 2016); "Mo'Swallow" (Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2014); and "juicy o'f the nest" (Sculpture Center, New York, 2014). Select group exhibitions include "A History of Desire: Art from the 20th Century to the Digital" (Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, 2019); "CHILDHOOD - Another banana day for the dream-fish" (Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2018); "Medusa" (2017) and "Co-workers, L'artiste comme réseau" (Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris, 2015-2016); the Gwangju Biennale (2018), "Inhuman" (Fridericianum, Kassel, 2015); "Europe, Europe" (Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo, 2014); Taipei Biennial (2014), Biennale de Lyon (2013), "Evocateur" (Fondation Pernod Ricard, Paris, 2012). David Douard was a resident fellow at the French Academy in Rome, Villa Medici from 2017 to 2018. His works are in the collections of Musée d'Art Moderne, Paris; Fonds national d'art contemporain, France; FRAC Île-de-France, Paris; and FRAC Limousin, Limoges.

Liu Shiyuan

Liu Shiyuan (b. 1985, Beijing) received her BFA from the Digital Media Art Department of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing. In 2012 she graduated with a Master's degree from the Photography Department of the School of Visual Arts, New York. Liu currently lives and works in Beijing and Copenhagen. Her artistic practice spans many mediums, including photography, video, text, spatial installation, and stage plays. By

eliminating preconceptions and subjective value judgments, Liu maintains a sensible and rational detachment toward the subjects in her works. Whether in self-produced film and photography or appropriated images and cultural resources, Liu fully mobilizes and recontextualizes the suspended semantics of her objects. Through this, the artist asks questions about many aspects of the world recorded and engulfed in images, such as how images shape stereotypes, how they disseminate propaganda, and the impact of pop culture on human perceptions and value standards. In a sense, be they pictures, texts, or physical objects, they are like actors to be directed and rehearsed by the artist to reactivate their original meaning and emotional potential, and to construct new pictorial mazes, narrative puzzles, and intellectual theaters in their interaction with each other.

Recent solo exhibitions include “Suspended Frames” (WHITE SPACE Caochangdi, Beijing, 2022); “For Jord” (Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, Los Angeles, 2020); “Opaque Pollination” (Frost Art Museum, Fort Lauderdale, 2020); “In Other Words, Please Be True” (WHITE SPACE Caochangdi, Beijing, 2019); “Isolated Above, Connected Down” (Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, New York, 2018); and “As Simple As Clay” (Yuz Museum, Shanghai, 2015). Recent group exhibitions include “Mirror Image: A Transformation of Chinese Identity” (Asia Society Museum, New York, 2022); the NGV Triennial (National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2020); “Lunar Phases” (UCCA, Beijing, 2019); “The Intertextuality of Art and Poetry” (OCAT Shenzhen, 2019); “Welcome to The Jungle” (Kunsthalle Dusseldorf, 2018); “Cold Nights” (UCCA Beijing, 2017); Yinchuan Biennale (2016); “Bentu, Chinese artists in a time of turbulence and transformation” (Fondation Louis Vuitton, Paris, 2016); and the 7th Shenzhen Sculpture Biennale (2012).

About UCCA Dune

UCCA Dune is an art museum buried under a sand dune by the Bohai Sea in Beidaihe, 300 kilometers east of Beijing. Designed by OPEN Architecture, its galleries unfold over a series of cell-like spaces that evoke caves. Some are naturally lit from above, while others open out onto the beach. As a branch of UCCA, China’s leading independent institution of contemporary art, it presents rotating exhibitions in dialogue with its particular site and space. UCCA Dune is built and supported by UCCA strategic partner Aranya, and located within the Aranya Gold Coast Community.

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