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Press Release

Cave Simulator

Artist: aaajiao

Opening: 2020. 5. 2

Exhibition Period: 2020. 5. 2 - 6. 21

AIKE is delighted to present aaajiao's solo exhibition "Cave Simulator", consisting of the artist's new works over the last three years. The exhibition will open on May 2 and will be on view until June 21, 2020.

This year, aaajiao shifts the focus of his practice on the "player", an identity any individual could claim as a result of information technology, the Internet, and the advent of virtual dimensions. Over the years, the artist's practice has undergone a process of exploring the role of the "user" (*User, Love, High-frequency Trading*, May 2017 Shanghai, Leo Xu Projects); to discovering the external memories of social media as a way of observing the self through "bot" (search engine information crawler software) (*bot*, Sep 2018 Berlin, House of Egorn), and now, to opening up a new possibility to become a "player".

This exhibition, "Cave Simulator", presents aaajiao's insight on the present conditions of life. For the artist, people live in a simulator, and everyone can be both a player and a simulator, who could extract oneself from it. Overseeing this entire situation from a broad perspective, one would see the simulator and oneself as the player, as well as the self who is in control of the simulator. "Cave" points the exhibition to a private and highly personal context, which demonstrates a mode of existence. The player's engagement in a simulated state of living allows him/her to grasp the kind of vulnerability of being in a cave.

This exhibition circumvents from arriving at any visual outcome. Instead, it induces the viewer to open up the sense about the traces, to imagine the process of their formation, hence to embrace a more diverse viewing experience, rather than limiting one's experience to the act of viewing—the works showcase aaajiao's recent studies on materiality. For *cave*, small objects with diverse details affixed to four structurally similar grey installations, that become the conduit for aaajiao's sense of security and a way of translating emotions. In *cave*, *nature*, and *natural materials*, aaajiao selects an easily indented material in the course of transportation – polyurethane foam for fire protection, and its surface treated with a blow torch, is left with natural-looking marks from inadvertent indentation. These works aim to provoke imagination for such action that generates these marks, rather than intends to produce an image or its eventual visual effect.

aaajiao's artistic expression does not only document actions, but also tries to convey data through pixelation with limited accuracy. *icon* consists of images generated by a mobile phone App. Similar to posting a message on Instagram, that describes a thought or an emotional with limited visual means and time. Such an approach to artistic practice is parallel to people's online behaviour – under a social environment of fragmented attentions and the decay of language and visual, aaajiao interrogates the possibility in rediscovering a more accurate daily expression. Also, *icon* and its animated editions - *icongif* brought the creation of *landscape.gif* series, which is formally exhibited

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for the first time. *icon.gif* and *landscape004.gif* convey an extended mood through the LED installation of such pixel drawings, the common understanding of data enables little animations to express emotions more clearly under limitations. *landscape.gif* assumes the perspective of a player inside a simulator, however this player is being controlled in a simulator, or the player in real life who is watching.

In aaajiao's works, many visual elements from previous artworks reincarnate in new pieces, which demonstrates the artist's desire to isolate from visuality. The installation *fur* is born out of his 2014 video work *meta*. The *meta series* does not necessarily visualise data or its specific properties, but data itself. *Fur* adopts the craftsmanship and unique materials of stuffed animals, and the "hairy" data makes up for the sweet and innocent aspect of this exhibition to introduce a realistic yet illusory immersion. Lastly, the installation *gumdrop* consists of two parts, behind the candy-wrapper material is a mass-reproduced photograph, and the camera's flashlight shone on the road is similar to the blind spot effect of the stage lighting. A small picture is found on the right bottom corner of the work, depicting a small child using info billboards on the street to play chess. Both of these two scenarios exhibit an unrealistic and magical sense of being seen in an inhabited urban environment that seems like a simulator, and the ones engaged in it assume the perspective of a player.

About the Artist

Active online as a media artist, blogger, activist and programmer, aaajiao is the virtual persona of Shanghai- and Berlin- artist Xu Wenkai. Born in 1984—the title of George Orwell's classic allegorical novel— and in one of China's oldest cities, Xi'an, aaajiao's art and works are marked by a strong dystopian awareness, literati spirits and sophistication. Many of aaajiao's works speak to new thinkings, controversies and phenomenon around the Internet, with specific projects focusing on the processing of data, the blogosphere and China's Great Fire Wall. aaajiao's recent projects extend his practice to various disciplines (among them, architecture, topography, and design) to capture the pulse of the young generation consuming cyber technology and living in social media.

aaajiao's work has been featured in numerous exhibitions around the world, upcoming and recent shows include "a'a'a'jiao: an ID", HOW Museum, Shanghai (2019); "Art in the Age of the Internet, 1989 to Today", The Institute of Contemporary Art Boston, Boston (2018); "unREAL", Haus der elektronischen Künste, Basel (2017); "Shanghai Project Part II", Shanghai (2017); "Temporal Turn: Art and Speculation in Contemporary Asia", Spencer Museum of Art, Kansas (2016); "Take Me (I'm Yours)" (curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist, Jens Hoffmann and Kelly Taxter), Jewish Museum, New York (2016); "Overpop", Yuz Museum, Shanghai (2016); "Hack Space" (curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist and Amira Gad), K11 Art Foundation Pop-up Space, Hong Kong and chi K11 art museum, Shanghai (2016); "Globale: Global Control and Censorship", ZKM | Centre for Art and Media, Karlsruhe (2015); "Thingworld International Triennial of New Media Art", The National Art Museum of China, Beijing (2014); and Transmediale, Berlin (2010). His solo exhibition includes: "Remnants of an Electronic Past", Centre for Chinese Contemporary Art, Manchester (2016); OCAT Contemporary Art Terminal Xi'an, Xi'an (2016), among others.

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