

## ***2020 Taiwan Biennial–Subzoology Curatorial Statement***

YAO Jui-Chung, Exhibition Curator

Physically exhausted, financially spent, and emotional bewildered after frenetic year of curating *Performance Art in Taiwan*, *Carefree: Taiwan Performance Art Relay*, and *Hyper Link: Contemporary Art Space and Artist Village Network in Taiwan*; publishing *Performance Art in Taiwan 1978-2004*; and establishing the VT Artsalon with friends from the art arena in 2005; I vowed to step away from curating exhibitions and to focus on my own art.

However, on the night of January 6 in 2020, Shengyao Temple appeared to me in a crystal-clear, technicolored dream. It had been a while since March 2016, when the gods told me in a dream to create *Incarnation* through which I visited temples great and small across Taiwan, but never came across of Shengyao. An online search revealed the temple worshipped the goddess Mazu; but did the omen bode well or ill? The very next evening, the Chief Curator of the Exhibition Department at the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts (NTMoFA) contacted me to invite me to curate the 2020 Taiwan Biennial. The timing was surprising because it had been 15 years since I curated a show. The younger generation, including my own students, were probably unaware that I'd ever curated exhibitions. We arranged to meet on the 14<sup>th</sup> at the Illusion Art Studio. I was in the midst of preparing the *Republic of Cynic (R.O.C.)* solo exhibition at C-Lab, and both the recent Asian Art Biennial and the Taiwan Biennial had just been curated by artists. Was it wise to take on this gargantuan task? The museum was sincere, but out of caution I asked for a week to consult Mazu before giving my reply. Exactly a week to the day, on return from an airport drop-off, I made a detour to visit the Shengyao Temple in Dacun Township, Changhua. I told the temple host about my dream. Instructions were given, offerings were made, and three positive moon blocks tosses yielded the lottery poem: "Calm waters make for smooth sailing on the Mid-Autumn moon. Cast worries aside and blessings will come soon," from the tale of the Dragon Prince's marriage proposal. The poem gave me pause as the Biennial was scheduled around the Mid-Autumn festival, and the Dragon King was at the pinnacle of the pantheon of beasts. This suggested to me a reinspection and reflection on issues affecting animals. I had an instant visualization, and set off immediately for the museum. It was after museum hours when I arrived; unfortunately, the chief curator had left for the day. While grabbing a bite before the long drive back to Taipei, the chief curator unexpectedly returned my call and came to meet me. I showed her the lottery poem, and we began discussions with great excitement.

Taiwan's discussions on globalization two decades ago have given way to the hot topic of

the “Anthropocene” in recent biennial exhibitions such as *Wild Rhizome* (2018), and *Post-Nature* (2018), which focused on human ecological destruction, environmental pollution, and climate change; and a number of recent exhibitions touched on Buddhist theology and the supernatural, including *Ghost, Spies, And Grandmothers* (2014), *The Return of Ghosts* (2014), *Kau-Puê: Mutual Companionship in Near Future* (2017), *Stories We Tell To Scare Ourselves With* (2019), *Yao-Chi City* (2019). With this in mind, I hoped to focus this year’s Taiwan Biennial on the twelve forms of life in the Buddhist animal realm of existence:

“born from eggs or from the womb, whether produced from moisture or from transformation, whether they have form or are without form, whether they have thought, are without thought, whether they are neither with nor without form, or are neither with or without thought;” and to invite artists to begin to contemplate works that focus on the topic of living organisms, in light of the tragic destruction of the global ecology through the human plundering of animal habitats and the domination and slaughter of animals in pursuit of human civilization and economic growth. This topic generated significant global outcomes, but required further promotion in Taiwan. The museum accepted this proposal, and agreed to gather relevant artists’ information. I left Taichung around 7pm to visit the Tianliao Moon World Park in Kaohsiung. When I arrived at 9pm, the park was illuminated in colorful lights, creating a surreal atmosphere. Alone in the expansive park, I took photos and was making my way back to the car when the extended and harrowing squeals of a pig being slaughtered pierced the air. It seemed to come from just outside the park gate. To avoid an encounter, I turned back toward the park again to take more photos, but suddenly, all of the lights went dark. Groping my way to the car, I looked up at the stars and contemplated the ephemerality of life. Curious about the source of the cries, I circled the block thrice, but only came across an illuminated sign for “Sun Moon Temple,” with not another soul in sight. The inspiration for *Subzoology* came to me in that moment. I chanted the *Heart Sutra* to myself to quell my rapidly beating heart, cancelled plans to stay at a temple guestroom, and drove through the night back to Taipei. I’d mentally completed a guest list for the exhibition en route, and arrived home in the early hours of the 22<sup>nd</sup>. It was afternoon when I woke. I emailed the list of artists to the museum and committed to vegetarianism for the rest of my days. The next morning, news broke of a new Coronavirus outbreak in China which had rapidly spread with travel over the Lunar New Year. The World Health Organization scrambled to contain the pandemic, and international borders closed in succession. There was a shortage of face masks. At the time of printing (September 17, 2020), near 30 million had tested positive globally, with a death toll approaching 930,000. Whether the virus was natural scourge, the disaster was inarguably exacerbated by baser-than-bestial human political wrangling and irrationality.

The Chinese exhibition title 禽獸不如 (baser than beast) alludes to an anecdote from the

Warring States Period of a frequent guest of Lord Mengchang who often expressed contrarian views. When popular opinion on a case of patricide condemned the killer as sub-bestial, this gentleman argued that the killer was equal to an animal, since patricides were common among beasts who were ignorant to their own paternity, but recognized their mothers. Matricides were far less common; hence, those who kill their fathers are beasts, but those who kill their mothers are baser than beasts. Compared to animals, human greed is insatiable. Animals hunt and compete to satiate hunger and thirst; they don't kill or attack unless their territory is threatened. But human beings throughout history have driven other creatures into extinction in order to satisfy their endless desires. If all of the earth's history was equivalent to 24 hours, human existence accounts for a mere four seconds, yet in this short time frame, 75 species now become extinct each day. Excluding the five mass extinctions in Earth's history, 83 percent of the Earth's species have become extinct since the rise of human domination. Overdevelopment and pollution have caused dramatic changes in the climate. If doomsday arrives as foretold, it won't be an act of Satan or God's judgement, but as a direct result of human evil. For these reasons, using an insult as the biennial's Chinese title is an act of tough love. A compromise was made in the English title. The museum director suggested the term "Subzoology", which could be taken to mean a branch of zoology or an underground study of zoology. The venue layout is basically a "zoo" unlike any zoo on earth. All of the invited artists are new to the Taiwan Biennial; 90 percent of them are young artists, and more than half of the works are new (including previous works that have been re-created to site specificities). Taiwanese and foreign artists with roots in Taiwan have been included. The disciplinary scope and approaches have been expanded, with 49 artists (collectives) invited to reflect on the theme, appropriating mantra plaques in Ranjana script as a visual design focus, where the three sutra sections of preparation, revelation, and transmission intersect the seven genres and an eighth genre of performance art as follows:

Launching the exhibit at the Taipei Satellite Event Area are three artists (collectives) who set up the question. In the work *Perverted Norm, Normal Pervert*, based on Joris Koene's research of the hermaphroditic characteristics in snails at the VU University Amsterdam Department of Animal Ecology, bio art practitioner Ku Kuang-Yi converts the sexual characteristics of snails into the following subthemes: hermaphrodites/human intersexuals, unisexuals/human drag queens, the love dart/human BDSM, and asexual reproduction/human cloning; to challenge the audience to contemplate definitions of "normal" or "abnormal." Inspired by the discovery of curative abilities in fungus from the fur of three-toed sloths of the tropical rainforest, Paul Gong's new bio art work *Sloth Effect: No. 2, The Dialogue between Fiction and Reality* imagines human axillary hair transformed into "micro-rainforests" through biotechnology. "The Bio axillary Hair" is used as a laboratory site to cultivate resistance to viruses that threaten humans. Dedicated to a fantasy

soundscape and technological shamanism, Meuko! Meuko! & NAXS Corp. attempt to transform chaotic city streetscapes into a virtual landscape through immersive virtual reality narratives, multiple-player online gaming concepts, dreamscape writing, sound collection, 3D scanning, electronic noise, and digital sculpture in their new work *Ghost Island: Innervation*. In the internet era, the accelerated collision between the individual and the collective has triggered a real-world cold war escalated by the pandemic, but is Taiwan really a ghost island? Do human beings truly have an afterlife? Are there six realms of existence in the Karmic wheel of reincarnation? The grief and glory of human history is intimately connected to all lifeforms. Is the future destiny of humans and all living things an irrevocable absurdity?

Subsequent works at the main exhibition venue attempt to answer the big questions posited above. The general flow of the exhibition site is based on the Taichi (yin-yang) diagram, with two main sections of an indoor (yin) area and an outdoor (yang) area. First, visitors stroll along the “light box exhibition area” on the outdoor green. Nine installations featuring 18 works by three photographers surround the secluded wooded trail. Jeff Chien-Hsing Liao’s six photos of the Taiwan Lantern Festival include hundreds of long-exposure high-resolution image files digitally collaged into a detailed and textured grand panoramic human theater that welcomes the appearance of the 12 zodiac animals in carnival style. In addition to the folk cultural heritage behind festive celebrations, there are also political grappling, resource allocation, peripheral industries, and the temple economy interconnected with pacifying the Annual Guardian. Each year, the 12 animals of the zodiac festival continue to be killed even as the zodiac festival continues to be celebrated. Using a large format camera, Yang Shun-Fa’s photos in *Taiwan To Go* depict packs of stray dogs roaming in destroyed wetlands or collapsed sandbanks, and reflect three layers of meaning: the reality of flooding caused by ground water extraction; the ironic painterly beauty of a crumbling environment; and a Taiwanese-language pun for “Taiwan underwater” (臺灣水沒) with the double entendre “Is Taiwan beautiful?” that questions the cost of disregarding the ecology. Peng Yi-Hang also uses a 4 5 large format film camera in night photographs of concrete animal sculptures at Qiurnao Garden and other parks, using a flashlight and long exposures of time. Faded, peeling, and distorted by day, the cloying statues in the *Ghost Park* series are revived by “direct photography” (no photoshop post-production) and resurrected by nightfall in the landscaped outdoor woodlands of the National Taiwan Museum of Fine Arts. The two “eyes” of the Taichi yin-yang symbol are respectively represented by the circular projection room, and the opening stage on the lawn near the entrance to the indoor exhibition area. A new age *brahma* sound ritual developed by Meuko! Meuko! & NAXS Corp. launches a time tunnel of a new media “urban transcendence *dharma* assembly” that connects the realms of the yin and the yang.

Greeting visitors as they enter the museum's vaulted Main Hall is Chen Sheng-Wen's work *their birth in grief, but not ashes*. Exquisite and dense, the painstakingly embroidered 12-meter sperm whale has been sliced open to reveal a mélange of construction waste behind the meticulously detailed surface. Behind this, the image space of a fishing vessel displays various charts and photographs from the daily lives of migrant deep-sea fisherman of Lu Yu-Jui's extended fieldwork and photography. Like the story of *The Old Man and the Sea*, Lu embedded with the crew of a deep-sea squid jigging boat for over 18 months, experiencing the harsh stifling life and the voices of the laborers who make a living chasing fish tens of thousands of miles from land. The fish haul may be frozen, but time ravages the fishermen lining their faces like water marks, a centimeter for each sea-mile. On opening day, Ghost Mountain Ghost Shovel will present a lecture performance in the Auditorium exploring how flocks of birds in flight rapidly disseminate information and generate collective strategies; and extends this to the human collective consciousness and ways in which societies utilize the violent consciousness to mete out punishment. A live audience experience is constructed through the novella- or parable-style narrative, parallel role exchange, lights, sounds, and the mise-en-scène of photography. Behind-the-scenes footage will be shown in the Main Hall afterwards. Reflecting on and elegizing the ecological environment, opening day flash mob performances at the sites of the Taichung Museum of Marine Biology surrounding area and the Da'an Port Mazu Culture Park will be screened on the wall of video displays adjacent to the lockers. These include WatdanWuma *Water World*, Yeh Tzu-Chi's *Net*, Sun Yi-Jou's *The Blood of Plants Is All Green*, River Lin's *Je suis Huxian*.

The discussion in Gallery 102 focuses on war and disease, with four artists developing intertextuality using World War II as a main axis. Obsessed by the homing instinct of pigeons, Lee Li-Chung recently honed in on the racing pigeons' former role as military pigeons, and traces the colonial movement through the military pigeons, historical documents, photos, films, and models in his new work *The Memo of Formosa Air Battle* in an exploration of the battle between the U.S. and Japan for supremacy over Taiwanese airspace in October 1944. This final large-scale military air campaign in the Pacific theater links the Tainan Air Group, General Flying Tiger Temple, Feiyan New Village (former Japanese Military Communication Center), and the tragic story between the American B52 fighter jet and the Japanese Mitsubishi J2M Raiden fighter aircraft. Inspired by 1930s Taiwanese and Japanese paintings, Ou Jing-Yun depicts an allegorical genre of joyous color, sensorial temptations, and violent madness in a mutual reference to grand non-narrative paintings through symbolic icons that contemplate the eternal issues of war, life, and death. The television series "Bandit Harimao" ("tiger" in Malay) based on the legendary WWII Japanese intelligence agent Tani Yutaka on the Malayan Peninsula, serves as a text for the Malaysian artist Au Sow Yee in *Act 1.1: Tiger Cave*, a follow-up to *Prelude: Song of Departure*, from

the series *The Extreme Journey of Perwira and the Calm Sea: In 3 Acts*. She attempts to reveal the ghostly tiger of a parallel history, a warrior on a calm but perpetual sea journey that never arrives at the destination of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. Cordoned off, Peng Yi-Hsuan's timed ultra-violet sterilizing light installation *UV Light: the Death of Invisible Organisms, the Smell of Sunshine* has a three-fold allusion: as response to the battle between invaders and defenders in the onslaught of war; as reflection of disinfection measures during the COVID-19 pandemic; and finally, as response to the ethnic cleansing of the Jewish people in concentration camps implied in Wu Chuan-Lun's work on the gallery's exterior wall. Two *Link (Apparitions Bet on the Machine)* apparatuses are installed on the pristine white walls in the sterile, vacuum-sealed room. The artist writes messages remotely on a mobile device and ghostly messages automatically appear on whiteboards in the unmanned UV room, hinting at the return of ghostly souls. In the adjacent gallery space, computer algorithms collect data on immortal cells in Wei Zé's new work *The Immortalized Cell from the Black Womb*, which is used to construct virtual images as a vehicle for the data, and information feedback is collected through the image interaction. The work reflects on how humans die incrementally with each passing moment. Cells engage in an endless battle of death and regeneration. When regeneration ceases, they are ruthlessly consumed and decomposed to oblivion by bacteria. For Chen Mao-Chang's new work *Plague*, facilities for a central monitoring system have been procured from Hikvision, a global leader in surveillance equipment. Images captured via the internet are produced into a black-and-white, single-channel video, shown during ten captivating real-time sound performances. Defunctionalized images are reconnected and reimagined to present psychedelic sounds and devastating images from the Black Death, in this tension-filled reflection on the expansion of comprehensive mechanisms of social control resulting from the pandemic. Then, we arrive at Wu Chuan-Lun's series of portraits of vintage Taiwan-made ceramic shepherd themed coin banks. The artist's interest in the breed was piqued by his collection of these coin banks, once common in Taiwanese households. He traced the history of the breed when he arrived in Germany, and began collecting porcelain dog figurines made by the Katzhütte (Hertwig & Co) (1864-1990). Referencing dog training facilities and using the porcelain dogs as models, Wu creates deformed sketches that he amalgamates into a large-scale installation with photo portraits of the Taiwanese coin banks and the original German porcelain figurines as a metaphor for the complex relationship in ideological struggles.

Hsu Yin-Ling's painting *Arranged Flowers by Pressure* echoes the adjacent porcelain German shepherds. Mounted specimens of octopus tentacles tell of a life-long pursuit among humans and beasts for a sense of presence that comes from memory. An octopus under stress gnaws at its own arms. For the octopus, a loss of hope is also a mode of survival, just as human beings endure varying degrees of change in their quest for a sense of presence in both

personal emotional memory and collective social history so that the self does not disappear into another person or a collective. During a residency at RUD AIR in Sweden, she fabricated the “Beast of Bengtsfors” character, through which she discusses the relationship between violence and human nature in the form of memoir, and interprets a violent human history with the forest as metaphor. Violence can also be discerned in Chang Teng-Yuan’s series *Parrot Man* since 2012. The difference is, the end of the world he foretells is based on the concept of “apocalyptic archaeology” where the earth is presumed to have been destroyed thousands of years prior. Parrot-like alien organisms arrive on planet Earth to reveal, through archeological research, the total destruction of human civilization. A cold alien landscape that is ostensibly charming but utterly decadent is constructed through twodimensional paintings, animation installation, and mixed media. In the adjacent exhibition space is Sun Pei-Mao’s surrealist paintings. Though the scenes he depicts are familiar, his unique perception of colors and light due to colorblindness lends a ghostly and illusionary intrigue to his paintings. The pervasive “artificial landscaping” in parks, temples, amusement parks, aquariums, and zoos often relegates human figures to the background, bringing the landscape to the fore. The dazzling array of uncanny landscapes reflect Taiwan’s unique aesthetic phenomenon in the aftermath of modern development. Similarly, ink painting in Taiwan has also experienced a localized baptism to develop a disparate vocabulary and aesthetic concepts. Hailing from Taimali Township in Taitung but residing in Hualien, Pan Hsin-Hua is passionate about nature and draws from seminal works of late Ming dynasty deformationism (Chen Hong-Shou, Wu Bin, Ding Yun-Peng, etc.). Arranged according to geographical fengshui diagrams, and using a monument-style composition, he depicts Prince Siddhartha’s eternal smile, dancing butterflies, children at play, etc., and appropriates Taihu stones from Qiu Ying’s *Spring Dawn in the Han Palace* and from Wang Wei’s exemplary *Wang River Villa*. The traces of water and pigment resisting on alum-treated cotton paper creates a richness of texture and elegance of color that refreshes as though entering a national park. Yen Yu-Ting who studied under Pan Hsin-Hua conjures scenes of life that amalgamate the modern and traditional through the fine brushwork of Eastern gouache painting. References to Persian miniature painting, traditional folk prints, and the Ukiyoe painting techniques combine to create a uniquely supple style. The painting is divided into windows using computerized geometry and composed through multiple perspectives with colors that embody a refreshing vibrancy. The elegant and decorative appearance conceals a murderous intent and absurdity. Studying under the same master, Tseng Chien-Ying is known for an adept use of multilayered ink renderings. Wrinkled texture lines and rendering are often seen in his unique detailed paintings of human figures, plants, or animals. His new work develops from the concept of “thoughts of all beings” from the *Diamond Sutra* to create the series entitled *Instanimals* featuring 18 “life drawings” of pets on the Instagram, reflecting on ways in which the authenticity of images on the screen often surpass reality itself in a simulation of

simulacra.

The Gallery Street exhibition space has been converted into a colorful maze. Measuring 16.2 meters in length and 3.4 meters in height, Lai Chiu-Chen's painting *Last Judgement under the Rainbow* is a riddle-like epic work composed of 68 paintings. Masterful in his technical skill, Lai's unique painting method creates a robust texture by layering flat acrylic colors that are buffed until matte. Suspended in the center of the painting is the Chinese character "阿" with religious connotations, which is flanked on two sides by images and symbols that signify an anticipation of a final judgement for ascension to heaven or condemnation to hell.

Oppositional binary values such as good or evil, loveable or horrifying, are sidelines in the intertextuality of these ambiguous images. Absolute black or white does not exist, just as a lens without a prism to refract a spectrum is no more than an unremarkable transparent material. At first glance, one might find cartoon characters such as Mickey Mouse and Minnie, SpongeBob and Superman or Batman cleverly positioned in the colorful geometric blocks of Keng Hao-Kang's semi-figurative paintings. Often constructed of simple geometric shapes, their characteristic charm is exaggerated, and their righteous mission emphasized. Distinctly vibrant and vivacious, the conclusion is always good wins over evil. The artist divides with vertical lines, separates with horizontal lines, drags with diagonal lines, triangular matrix, and rhombus-shaped color blocks. He deconstructs and reorganizes using painterly techniques such as flat coloring, scratching, collage, peeling, or overlay, to hint at ways a flattened planar world is more three dimensional than the real world, and more profound than fantasy. Around the corner is a wall displaying Chen Yu-Ka's work *Before and After the Blankness* composed of found debris and depicting natural phenomena such as meteors, comets, tornadoes, and volcanic eruptions that lead to the mass mutation and extinction of species. Helpless animals vanish, and the destruction of human civilization is accelerated, symbolizing the ephemeral fate of the "Anthropocene" destined for complete disintegration, to be utterly crushed like clustered foam. Like the various overly beautified, dreamy bubble-like worlds in the plasma liquidized fluorescent screen, the birds in the liquid jungles created by Huang Ko-Wei seem realistic, but are in reality, flat masses of a certain thickness dried and shrunk after sketches of still-life objects on the monitor have been made using automatically flowing paint on a flat surface. He addresses the definition of contemporary painting through "visualized painterliness". Like taxidermied specimen with a borrowed soul, animals in nature and the life of inanimate objects are transformed into liquid traces. Chuang Pei-Xin's work *Digital Taxidermy* responds to Huang Ko-Wei's liquidity through 3D printing. Digital output photographs that have been kneaded into wrinkled membrane are secured with resin clay and suspended on stainless steel tubing along with found objects, organic glass, and taxidermy, etc., to shape a super-narrative engine circuit located within a digital vacuum. These pristine, obedient image materials downloaded

from the internet are not concerned with immediacy or historicity. Conditions for shaping information on the cloud come from the endless desires attached to the mortal world. Beside this is Luo Jr-Shin's installation work *Like a filter, matters passed through you and became a part of you*, which is a consolidated, upgraded edition of his two previous solo exhibitions *Snails (Not Included)* (2019) and *Like a Urinal in a Nightclub* (2018). A metaphor for the explosive bestial state of primal desires is created through hybrid space outfitted like a nightclub, boutique, or motel with cheap vinyl flooring and matting; a bucket of hopped wort; a bathtub whose spout is connected to a water pump; snail shells sans snails and vibrant fruits; implements for making liquid stimulants like glass vessels, filtering papers, funnels and mortar and pestle, etc.; a mirror fitted with florescent lights in a UV printed metal frame; and even containers of Viagra. These arenas composed of "ill-materialism" are vessels for mortal desires and come from the most primal of human fears – loneliness that seeks out loneliness.

The earliest known prehistoric cave paintings in the Leang-Leang cave in South Sulawesi, Indonesia are a point of entry for Wu Chi-Yu's photographic work *Hominins* which greets visitors as they enter Gallery 107. Like Plato's allegory of the cave and the belief in shadows as truth and illusions as reality, human beings began with depicting their world in cave murals and, after millennia, have arrived at an era of the internet/airwaves/virtual reality. The work interrogates what constitutes reality: "nature" or the conception of nature? And what is the essence of all lifeforms found in nature? Hsiao Sheng-Chien provides a classical industrial contemplation in an analog era with an electrical motor jungle in his work *Return*. A mechanically propelled installation based on the concept of a loudspeaker is suspended like an insect pupa, and the euphonious sounds of birds and insects emit from loudspeakers assembled with found objects to reproduce a rich layering of natural sounds from childhood memories that have been devastated by industrial civilization. In Cheng Hsien-Yu's interactive work *Afterlife Ver.2.0* installed in the Bamboo Courtyard, an electric mosquito zapper collects a "life" for each bug killed. These are accumulated as turns in a videogame, where visitors use up a "life" each time they lose at the game, alluding to how a life is often just an inconsequential number. The ephemeral lives of the swarms of human beings are no different from these captured insects, accompanied only by karma when their souls dissipate. Concealed in the adjacent second floor hallway, the array of directional sound installations aimed toward the first floor is Wu Ping-Sheng's work *Anteriusound Series-Imitation* which has been meticulously designed using the technology of Huygens – Fresnel principle to reverse calculate in real-time and re-render audio into space. Every 45 seconds (the average time spent in front of a cage at the zoo), speakers placed around 30 centimeters in front of the audience will emit a question about animals voiced by children between four and ten years old, in a reexamination of the conflicting agendas of human beings. The

Courtyard faces the 365-degree circular projection room, designated as the “wormhole” that connects the “yin” aspect to the “yang” aspect, where Li Yi-Far’s work *Important\_message.mp4* is on display. In the film, the author’s avatar uses various illustrations and adapts appropriated internet rumors about the farm industry in a straight-faced, eloquent yet absurd explanation of how a snail infected by a flatworm parasite gains six brain cells to become more intelligent, and infers through false rationale a convoluted conspiracy theory involving zombie bath salts, the drug trade, the American Purity Association, Thuocduame aphrodisiac, etc., to explore the schizophrenic state of being parasitized and mentally controlled. The film refers to “global mind control” or, colloquially, “possession by spirits” , and the development of internet technologies leading to the ultimate goal of total political control through brainwashing to be “disappeared.” To satirize the fact that a lack of technological maturity doesn’t equate to an absence of pervasive surveillance, the film ends with a quote from the poem “Facing the Sea with Spring Blossoms” (2001) written by the Chinese poet Hai Zi before he committed suicide. Where there is surveillance, there is “countersurveillance.” Methods such as disguise, fake news, media spin, smoke bombs, etc., have now created an intelligence paralysis and mental confusion in humans, in an inextricable state of ecstatic multiple split personality.

The scaled economy of biological industries is the main topic explored on the museum’s second floor. In Gallery 202, Chu ChunTeng’s work *Rooftop* was filmed during his 2018 residency in Tengchong City, Yunnan. The jadeite processing and stone gambling industries have brought wealth to the area, leading to aggressive urban renewal. During his residency period, a development of 640,000 hectares driven by the local nouveau riche drastically changed the natural ecology of the area. It was as though a grand theatrical set was infested by a rare species, and the focus was on the cleaning women in the model homes, whose only job was to make sure all of the assets remain spotless, and were forbidden from sitting down or leaving any traces of their existence. The desires and motivations of these low-level cleaning women are linked through a non-linear three-channel narrative that alludes to the relationship of class struggle that was always present among humans and beasts, and the traces of class servitude that remain indelible in modern life. Canadian artist Sheryl Cheung draws out a work combining sound and hand-painting in *Venom-Anti-Venom* by introducing a series of interactions between medication, Chinese medical practices, the human body, nature, and society. The work was inspired by the Naga faith in northern Thailand which resonated with her research on the relationships between Chinese legends of the dragon, compendia of Chinese medicinal herbs, and spirituality. The Naga spirits believe that the flowing rivers in nature are one with the internal rivers that flow within all organisms, whether blood, bile, phlegm, pus, sweat, fat, tears, saliva, urine, mucus, or semen, etc., which must flow freely or face collapse if circulation and balance cannot be achieved. Visitors are invited to peruse the

23 volumes of poetic fables at the exhibition site that tell of the interdependence between the local people and their gods. Hailing from Kaohsiung, but residing in the city of Breda in the Netherlands, Lo Sheng-Wen collected some 3000 (80 grams) of goose down in 2017, before leaving for a residency in the North Pole (78°17'N-80°02'N), with which he made a down jacket. He wore this on the three-week long journey by sea to the Arctic Circle, made his landing, and climbed glaciers 21 times. During this period, he used a thermal camera, temperature sensors, and heartrate sensors to record data on his efforts to keep warm, and compiled this for public reference in a free handbook, which constitutes this no-kill work of self-sufficiency, *Down*, made entirely of found objects, and free from production and sales. Through practical scavenging action, this work reflects on ecological changes such as the hole in the ozone layer and the melting polar ice caps. In response, Cheng Hsien-Yu's new work *We are just saying how you are ruling*, created by using internet image searches and Machine Learning, captures vast quantities of images using "human ecological destruction" as key words, and condemns ecological extinction caused by human greed, waste, and development where the computer uses the first-person pronoun "I". What is terrifying is that through the algorithms and data analysis of autonomic learning and update enhancements, the computer begins to make accurate predictions and gradually becomes "omnipotent". Most human beings as well as entire nations become unable to control data, but are instead controlled by data. Of course, the fate of many animals is mutually wrapped up in national politics. Hsu Chia-Wei's work *Stones and Elephants* commissioned for the Singapore Biennale and making its Taiwan debut, quotes two chapters of the 1849 literary classic, *Hikayat Abdullah* as narration; one chapter describes how the British destroyed the Malacca fortress stronghold and returned it to the Dutch East India Company. The demolished stonewall at the exhibition site is the simulated output from the text. And the film shown on two vertical 80-inch flat-screen televisions leaning against the wall is based on the text of another chapter, of a description of Malacca's people by the secretary of Malacca's Major General William Farquhar, and a scene describing of Farquhar employing shamans to capture elephants. He invites Malay shamans to read the two stories in Malay, and films the process of blessing the elephants to imply that the Dutch East India Company monopolized trade through its 35 Asian strongholds for maritime domination over all landbound empires. Another work *Black and White –Giant Panda* reflects on animal diplomacy which was performed in collaboration with Japanese *manzai* (comedic duo) artists at the Cultural Center of the Taipei Trade and Cultural Representative Office in Japan in March of 2018. The history and issues surrounding panda diplomacy are explored using the cute image of the Panda, laughter, and profanities. The darkness hidden under the platforms of history and international diplomacy are investigated by combining images, historical materials, and the on-screen viewing experience. The documentary short *AKCEPT* is a collaboration between Martin Tokár from Slovakia and Sun Yi-Jou, a husband and wife duo. Through cinematic

techniques, the film showcases the pure ability of animals to respond to their environment. Through a poetic and metaphorical story axis, the human dialectical process of self-inflation and inferiority is revealed in rich humanistic concern. Continuing along the second-floor corridor and looking down through an aquarium-like sheet of blue glass, the sperm whale model floats into view. On the walls are fifteen embroidered works featuring marine organisms indigenous to Taiwan, made with garbage that Chen Sheng-Wen collected. Delicate and cruel these reflect the beautiful elegy of the whale in the Main Hall. Playing in the screening room here are videos of past performance and sound art works by WatdanWama, Yeh Tzu-Chi, Sun Yi-Jou and Fu Ya-Wen that explore the mutual relationship between human bodies and biological anatomy through themes such as eggs, rhinoceroses, rabies and prosthetics, etc.

Gallery 101, symbolizing “crossing over darkness” can be reached by traversing the Main Hall and Museum Shop to the left side of the museum. Wu Chi-Yu's film *The Nuclear Power Plant and the Dog* with the renowned 18 Princes as the protagonist, greets visitors as soon as they enter the vaulted exhibition space. To one side of the palace atrium is a 30-meter tall sculpture of “Black Dragon Dog”. Throngs of faithful crowd this temple to the netherworld at night with their pleas, with rice dumplings in hand. Nearby is Taiwan's First Nuclear Power Plant, one of the three most dangerous nuclear power plants in the world (another is the Second Nuclear Power Plant). Invisible spirits, nuclear power, and desires converge at the foot of this mountain. The three walls surrounding the screen is photographer Tou Yun-Fei's portrait series *Memento Mori* that record the last moments of life for shelter dogs before they are euthanized. Through his lens, the photographer captures the absurd policy that humans consider it a crime punishable by death to be a dog without a master. The dignity of life is demonstrated using professional lighting and photographic techniques. Rather than stealing your soul, photographs are a witness to death. Due to border restrictions during the pandemic, the work *Alive* by Germany-based artist Fu Ya-Wen will be performed by renowned dancer Chou Shu-Yi. An installation of 24 coiled springs is attached to the human spine to restrain, restrict, and counteract in a process similar to that of taming a wild beast. In the work *Surgery of Muse: Implant* by Chang Chen-Shen, the ersatz operating room is replete with surgical instruments and an operating table. Cloaked in medical scrubs, the artist spends 12 hours implanting human hairs into a pig's head, an allusion to the Buddhist association of hair with earthly woes. Afterwards, the pig's head is placed in a glass case filled with formalin as an uncanny atmosphere and scent fill the dimly lit room. In the 12 links of dependent origination in Buddhism (ignorance, formation, consciousness, name and form, sense faculties, contact, feeling or sensation, craving or thirst, clinging or grasping, worldly existence, becoming, decline), the pig represents ignorance, exhibiting characteristics of irrational persistence, delusions, and an inability to discern fact from fiction. The act of

performing hair transplant on a pig's head is a comment on the idiocy of humankind, and the necessity to recognize the delusion and to destroy it to find the true heart. A member of the heavyweight avant-garde art group, Living Clay, Lin Ju has created three paintings in a series specifically for this exhibition entitled *The Study of the Sacred*, which continues in his mystical profound style of *The Sighted Flesh* (1995) and *The Nine Mirrors of the House of Wuchi* (1999). Exhibited works include *Namo Worse-than-Beast Bhaisajyaraja Bodhisattva Wuhan-Wuhan Avalokitesvara*, and *Namo Golden-Feces-Jade-Urine Treasure Bucket Avalokitesvara*, which use traditional brushwork and ink painting techniques to depict the corporeal body of bodhisattva who does not appear solemn but whose name is solemn and therefore is not solemn, to show that that bodhisattva has the wisdom to live beyond reincarnation, and the compassion to live beyond Nirvana, and is one in the realm of great sorrow. The triptych is akin to Ksitigarbha Bodhisattvaya guarding the netherworld, crossing over the darkness. Chi Kai-Yuan's video installation *Sticky Rice Turtle* connects his grandmother and childhood experiences of watching the pastry chef making turtle-shaped confections out of glutenous rice, and is the first installment of his 2017 *Prosperity Turtle* series which captures, through the intimacy of documentary, the two pastry chefs in their process of making these confections each year on the eve of the Lantern Festival. By participating and producing these ritual offerings, the labor of craftsmanship imparts a corporeal memory in the hands. The two-channel video and unique soundtrack form three narratives. A platform containing an image archive of prosperity turtles, documented by the artist from age seven to present, is displayed in the recessed space between the two projection screens. The mutual reference and retrospection between the film and the objects seem to allude to a symbolic return to the womb of life. Across the way, River Liri's *Huxian au musée* is positioned inside a palatial perforated wooden structure, where a coven of vamps launches their one-day occupy-the-museum action. On opening day, 20 LGBTQ performers and a few heterosexual performers dressed as "internet hotties" from the Taichung area will intervene in the museum arena and perform various absurd, sexy, and vampy quotidian actions such as singing, dancing, doing yoga, taking selfies, group photos with art works, and group photos with visitors, etc., appearing as men and women, both man and woman, both human and animal. When Taiwan became the first Asian country to recognize homosexual marriage in 2019, *Huxian Memorial Hall* has fabricated texts around the Huxian's brief history, the Huxian's various incarnations to date, as well as various metamorphoses in memory of a pioneering group of Asian Queers who have since passed away. Malaysian artist Tan Kian-Ming spent four years as a student in Taiwan. As a child monk in Penang's Kek Lok Si Temple, he was mesmerized by the burial culture, and often contemplated life's meaning and concepts of mortality, impermanence, suffering, and emptiness. For his new work *Paradise*, he makes foil rubbings of the tomb guardian beasts and animal reliefs on tombstone of the Qing dynasty officials above the fifth grade interred in Malaysia. The rigid stone tombs are

recreated by dozens of delicate, ethereal aluminium foil sheets suspended in air. The promise of eternal fame and immortal victories are nothing more than empty vanity in the haze of history, just like the violet glow of the 49 mosquito traps in Peng Yi-Hsuar's work *No Regret Strategy* reflected in the foil tombstones. Human lives or deaths are as insignificant as that of the countless mosquitoes and flies, and as ephemeral as a moth drawn to the flame. Life is a pursuit of ending without suffering and leaving nothing to regret. Finally, we arrive at a five-channel projection of the black-and-white animation work *Ritual of Cathode Ray Tube* by Zhang Xu-Zhan, who is heir to a family paper-paste business. Disillusioned by the dying art of paper-paste craft as a child, Zhang began experimenting with unveiling uncanny and luxurious narrative to cheer himself up. This is the first of his seminal works featuring a bat as the protagonist, coordinated with 51 original manuscripts on the outer wall. These tell the tale of how human civilization unfolded from the cave, and may ultimately end with a mysterious virus from the cave.