

# What Are We Truly Thinking About When We Think About the World?

Text / Feng Xi

The project is a two-year work plan in Ding Shiwei's art creation. Each piece of work is designed as an introducing element and presented collectively in the narrative logic of the exhibition. In terms of principle, logic, design, craft and exhibition, there is a progressive and cyclical relationship between each independent work, which forms an inseparable link with the space. The space is no longer a cube, but the sea at the end of the horizon, or the stem of a plant that keeps spreading and growing. The independent attribute of the work has definitely not been eliminated. The information that each work conveys has become the adhesive between texts, and forms an intertextual relationship of identity, production and narration in the exhibition context, from an individual work to a project. Meanwhile, it has also become a spatial deduction of the artist's working method.

Ding is quite talented at presetting things. We communicated frequently for a whole year to revise our project, until its integration with the space reached the critical point. The project is presented in the three exhibition halls on the two floors, forming a tractive and intertextual link in the exhibition context and spatial relation. In the main exhibition hall on the first floor, five works form the moving line of viewing, with each work raising a question independently, designing the intersection of related languages, and establishing the common paradoxical consciousness and discussion. The progressive relationship has become the main line of the exhibition. The gazing at the sea horizon and the moon describes the eternal relevance and experience from the perspective of human consciousness. In the work *The Edge of the Earth*, a glass tank with a "sea level" is placed in a transparent screen box, and the sea level in the video keeps pace with that in the water tank. With the change of colors and rise and fall of waves, the borders of the true

and false seas appear 3-dimensional, so the viewers can understand the real intention of gaze when they are gazing, and the visual experience of “turbulence”. The distance, the end, the infinity, the reachability, and the inaccessibility, all these have become the question we raise – “What are we truly staring at when we stare at the sea horizon and the moon?” The space is opened on the basis of the order established by the artificial “sea horizon”. Blue has become the logic of the language of space, and blue and white have been divided proportionally. Blue stands for the sea, while white stands for the land. The “solid sea” has been surrounded by the square visually, and the viewers will have to either dive in the sea or step on the land. Due to Malevich’s profound influence on art, the shapes of square and circle have been considered nearly perfect, which has also influenced Ding’s world view. The square and the circle are clearly distributed around the central axis of the exhibition, and a longitudinal line runs through the center. *Emerging Knowledge*, which is placed on the ground, is composed of a sea vortex painted on the square canvas and a swirling on the circular canvas, with a sphere and a cube suspended above them respectively. The two magnets have pushed the suspending objects into constant rotation, which has become the core component of the time concept. With its paradoxical and progressive attributes, *Fragments of Civilizations* is played on the huge screen that is hanging in the axis of the exhibition hall. The sphere and the cube present the disappearing trail of the fragments that have collided after being drawn to each other. It seems as if all the human civilizations and cognition have become fragments, which are then reshaped into new civilizations and indicate future collisions. At the far end of the exhibition hall lies the frameless work *Circle and Dandelions*, which composes of 28 circles with different attributes and functions. The interval rhythm of slowness and quick flashing has brought about adequate visual imagination. Meanwhile, Ding also intends to pay tribute to artist Nam June Paik with *Circle and Dandelions*, whose work, titled *The Moon Is the Oldest TV*, also has a horizontal screen. The smallest work, *Immortal Gazing*, is arranged in the horizontal axis of the space, with a pair of motionless eyes displayed above the two 3.5-inch raspberry Pis. The eyes gradually switch from those of males to

females, and their identity, gender and even the orientation of civilization have been blurred. They are simply gazing at the overall logic and narration.

Only one piece of work, *Relational Aesthetics*, is displayed in the small exhibition hall on the first floor. It converges on the axis of the main exhibition hall, just like the pair of eyes whose attributes have been stripped away in the work *Immortal Gazing*, which brings about the extraction of unknown knowledge and the process of civilization. With the layout of the images, the design of the interrelated and relatively unrelated structural evolution, the core of the exhibition has been fully presented by *Relational Aesthetics*, as these images have included all the titles of the works, and summarized them in language. Therefore, the artist's logical law can be deduced, and the questions raised are further discussed in groups. The independent installation *The Oldest TV* in the exhibition hall on the second floor is composed of a black square pool and a luminous moon rotating in the air. It seems to flow endlessly through the long stretch of time. It is so quiet that it seems only relevant to "souls". It forms an intertextual relationship with *Circle and Dandelions* and *The Edge of the Earth* downstairs, and also provides a meaningful end to the interpretive function of *Relational Aesthetics*.

"What are we truly staring at when we stare at the sea horizon and the moon?" As the starting point of the project, the question is also what Ding wants to ask viewers. The "meta-point" of the project is exactly the awakening of question consciousness, and the logic of the question is a repeating cycle where the entrance is also the exit. Here, a more eternal question is also asked, "What are we truly thinking about when we think about the world?"