

## DING SHIWEI: ENTER THE VOID

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Translation / ChatGPT

In his solo exhibition *Enter the Void*, Ding Shiwei sought to build his creative trajectory around a set of core questions: How is the subject reconstructed by digital and technological objects within the mediated environment of digital technology? What forms of existence do technological media assume in both real and virtual spaces? How does digital politics forge new connections with the body, with seeing, and with the gaze? These questions extend beyond the traditional scope of new media art practices.

In his new work *The Jokers' Revolution No. 1* (all works mentioned here were created in 2020), Ding appropriates Annette Lemieux's 1995 piece *Left, Right, Left, Right*—a work she famously inverted in 2016 after Donald Trump's election to express her anxiety and critique. Ding substitutes the raised fists of political dissidents in the original with those of virtual and cartoon characters such as Popeye, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Astro Boy, and Black Cat Detective. Their left or right hands are raised high, while the flat blue screen background becomes a new square, a new street, of the digital era. In another work from the series, *The Jokers' Revolution No. 5*, emoji fists from mobile phones are used to symbolize different political identities. Through three lenticular layers, the fists shift between black, white, and yellow depending on the viewer's vantage point. Together, the "Jokers' Revolution" series employs raised fists and arms to reference political meaning and emotional appeals, not only grounded in history and contemporary reality, but also in the politics of social networks and digital interfaces. These works, through various media strategies, collectively create a data-field where information, digital politics, and daily life intersect.

Another interactive series, *Aesthetic Distance*, employs a human-machine sensing system calibrated to the one-meter social distance mandated during the pandemic. When the viewer stands beyond one meter, the face on screen retains a perfect smile; once this boundary is crossed, the smile collapses. Another set of works, *The Abyss Watchers*, is also bound to distance. Here the gaze is situated between the viewer's body, their eyes, and the faces rolling across the screen. Through a minuscule aperture on a 0.24-inch display, the viewer peers at human skin in microscopic detail, at continuously overlapping faces, while being met with the sharp gaze of the digital figure staring back. Human and machine mutually examine one another, co-constituting a "Truman Show"-like world.

This "mirror" relation between the subject and technological object also appears in *The Vanishing Prophecy* series. On one side, blue screens cycle endlessly through twenty "existential" questions produced by data streams: Who am I? An artwork? A machine? A screen? (*The Vanishing Prophecy No. 1*). On the other, the very same questions are inscribed on human necks and arms (*The Vanishing Prophecy No. 2*) before being re-recorded on video, then immersed—together with other mechanical components—in insulating oil reminiscent of formaldehyde. They become specimens, mutually affirming each other's existence.

As the exhibition's closing gesture, the artist deliberately leaves a fist-shaped cavity in the corner of the gallery wall. From it, thick black power cords emerge—one end tethered to the devices in the space, the other pointing toward the invisible energy source that drives them. Behind the visible screens, data, information, and technical objects looms an abyss, leading who knows where.