

DING SHIWEI: THE VANISHING PROPHECY

Text / Zhang Yingying

Translation / ChatGPT

From *The Vanishing Prophecy No.1* to *The Vanishing Prophecy No.2*, Ding Shiwei stages what may be described as an “upgrade”—a concept we now encounter in terms like “industrial upgrade,” “system upgrade,” or “conceptual upgrade.” Yet the significance of this transition is not limited to expanded complexity of content, function, or visual density. More crucially, the work gestures toward the emergence of an ecosystem that does not belong to the natural world. Within this imagined ecology lie fragments of the artist’s speculation on the fundamental conditions of human existence in a possible future.

In No.2, existential questions resurface in a different register: *What am I? Am I an artwork, or merely a machine? Do I exist for a purpose? Do I possess life, or even a soul? Can I endure? Can I dwell poetically? Can you feel me?* These questions reverberate as though posed by a solitary spirit to the cosmos. Yet they rebound onto the viewer, pressing humanity itself for an answer. The inquiry is not about stabilizing subjectivity, but rather about tracing the boundaries of its possibility. Thinking itself, Ding suggests, is already a form of growth.

Inside the work, modular fragments—screens, circuitry, insulating fluids—appear as “electronic organs,” never coalescing into a whole. This fractured composition mirrors the way our attention and actions today are atomized by screens. If, in the post-Internet condition, our bodies now operate only through the partial activation of organs, where is wholeness to be found? Thought, once the unifying force of the body, is increasingly expropriated by electronics. Ding imagines a future where survival may require only a pair of eyes, a few agile fingers, and a smart terminal extending beyond the body—a semi-intelligent, semi-mechanical, semi-fragmented post-human existence.

The aquarium-like form of *The Vanishing Prophecy No.2* recalls Damien Hirst’s *Natural History* series or Pierre Huyghe’s *Anthropocene aquariums*. Yet while the formal resemblance is striking, Ding’s concerns diverge. His work articulates a deeply humanist care—an insistence that even the smallest particles of interstellar space or the shimmer of a digital screen might harm, or at least affect, the warmth of the human body. Such sensitivity is the ground of his practice.

Paradoxically, artificial intelligence now enters the same terrain of humanist concern. Ding suggests that AI, once an external tool, has become a co-runner on the same track as human beings, shaping not only our technological futures but also our ethical imagination.

The Vanishing Prophecy No.2 thus refuses to remain a mere technological spectacle. It is an unsettling ecology, where humanist care, post-human speculation, and fragmented corporeality entangle. By disassembling and reassembling the very organs of our mediated lives, Ding calls us to confront not only what remains of “the human,” but also what forms of existence might succeed it.