

Q:Radius

A: Ding Shiwei

Translation / ChatGPT

1. What first drew you to media art? What excites you most about the process?

The earliest influence came from the Xi'an International Animation Festival in 2012, curated by Zhang Yaxuan. At that screening, I encountered many animation works by contemporary artists. Later, I followed artists such as Nam June Paik, Zhang Peili, Bill Viola, and Tony Oursler. They integrated various media—especially audiovisual media—into art, which deeply inspired me. At the same time, I have always had a strong interest in architecture and space, which has cultivated my ability to think about how artworks engage with spatial contexts.

2. Do you remember the first work that became widely recognized? What special meaning did it have?

It should be the nine-screen video installation *Goodbye Utopia* created in 2014. In terms of medium, it marked an important connection point in my practice, bridging animation (my undergraduate major) and the medium of installation (which I later explored during my postgraduate study in media art).

Conceptually, it resembled a farewell performance to historical myths of collectivism and square politics: the opening was already the curtain call, the beginning was already the end.

3. You have made a series of works related to life, cognition, and time, such as the project *What We Talk About When We Talk About* (2017–2018), *Meteor Sonata* (2015–2016), and *Utopia* (2013–2014). What draws you to continuously explore the concepts of time and life?

Both of these concepts share something in common: eternity—they are knots every individual must face. As a creator, they are unavoidable subjects for me. The poet Xi Chuan once said in an interview: “Some artists work for eternity, while some artists work for the present.”

*What We Talk About When We Talk About*, *Meteor Sonata*, and *Utopia* were all projects working toward eternity, whereas starting from *Enter the Void* I began to attempt working for the present.

4. Since becoming a media artist, what has been the best thing and the worst thing?

They are the same: the eyes are always watching, and the mind is always thinking. This is a double-edged sword.

5. In this fast-changing and fragmented era, facing increasing noise, how do you select and edit information from the outside world as inspiration for creation?

For an artist, editing and processing the materials of our time is essential work. “Symbols,” the systems behind them, and their interlinked narrative structures have been the focus of my research in recent years.

6. What is the greatest challenge you face today?

The challenge is always myself. To elaborate, it is that I find it difficult to relax, often being in a state of tension.

7. What does a typical working day look like for you? Besides work, what else do you enjoy doing?

Most workdays I move between the computer, the workbench, and the project boards in my studio—pausing, thinking, and working with my hands. I enjoy the time from afternoon to evening spent alone in the studio. Even if I do nothing, simply being immersed in that environment makes me feel at peace.

Outside of work, I most enjoy watching football, playing football, and video-game football (PES). I am a typical football fan.

8. In your growth, were there people or cultural influences that deeply shaped you?

That would be my two mentors. Professor Zhang Peili—both his person and his works radiate strength and aura, which profoundly moved me. Conversations with Professor Geng Jianyi are memories I often revisit—his words, like his works, were like labyrinths of thought.

9. How do you observe and reflect on the rapid development of technology?

The final chapter of *Enter the Void—The Abyss Watchers*—is a discussion of technological ethics. While we seem to dwell in a dazzling and colorful reality, perhaps beneath it lies a fragile, dizzying, and bottomless abyss.

10. With the gears of the era turning so rapidly, and social networks flourishing in recent years, is this a good era for an artist?

I believe every era has its beautiful perspectives, as well as its unbearable sides. For an artist, what matters is to observe the present keenly and respond accordingly—just as when encountering an unfamiliar space, one immediately begins to imagine it.

11. From the worldview of a media artist, how do you see the future?

I consider myself to have a strong undertone of pessimism. The third chapter *The Vanishing Prophecy* discusses precisely this topic of the future. Two “specimens,” one large and one small, were immersed in liquid screens.

One work presented a cylindrical container of liquid, with an OLED screen displaying an endless loop of 20 existentialist questions on a blue background, together with its control unit—functioning as a “specimen” from the future, holding a cross-temporal dialogue with the audience.

The other was a cubic container of liquid, with five curved screens showing close-ups of human skin under constant scrutiny, with tattoo-like existential questions inscribed upon it. Here, the human body itself was staged as a “specimen,” immersed in a formalin-like solution. From these two works, you can sense my attitude toward the future.

12. What are your plans for the future?

For now, to take a break. Afterwards, I will continue extending questions derived from this project. As I mentioned earlier with the term “random flow,” I want to let consciousness and creation flow randomly a little while longer.