

Q: Hunsand Space

A: Ding Shiwei

Translation / ChatGPT

1. This exhibition *Specter's Ventriloquism* presents five new works, which together construct a discussion on whether the Internet world itself possesses "ethics."

Before we begin this conversation, I would like to ask: What is your personal understanding of traditional religion?

Traditional religion has always been a way for humanity to search for the meaning of life and to explore the essence of existence. Through rituals, symbols, and systems of belief, it provides an ethical framework that enables people to find order and comfort in a chaotic world. In traditional religion, "transcendence" itself becomes a kind of "sublime," shaping the fundamental categories of morality and ethics, and guiding humanity to search for the "eternal" within transcendence.

2. Religion is the inevitable manifestation of humanity's search for meaning in life. Today, how do you view the relationship between the Internet and human beings?

Contemporary society has entered an age of "simulacra" and "hyperreality," where the boundaries between the real and the virtual have blurred. Symbols and signs have drifted away from their original meanings, circulating in a groundless loop of references. Against this backdrop, the Internet functions as a new kind of "religion." It is no longer about the pursuit of meaning but rather about the circulation and reproduction of signs.

In this "electronic wasteland," technology and virtual reality replace the symbols of traditional religion, becoming new vessels of "faith." As Byung-Chul Han suggests, humanity in the technological age is trapped in a "burnout society"—an era of self-exploitation without external constraints. Here, morality and ethics are no longer defined by external authority but are dominated by the internal logic of efficiency and productivity. Thus, the "ethics" of the Internet manifest more in the operation of data and algorithms than in traditional categories of good and evil.

The Internet is both a platform for freedom and a new form of confinement. Each of us becomes a sufferer before the screen, exposed to invisible power structures. It manipulates our perception and understanding, urging us to seek an unattainable "real." Yet the Internet's belief system rests on the blurred boundary between virtual and real. "Transcendence" itself demands contact with the "real," but within this boundary, the "real" does not exist. This is a paradox.

3. Whether in the real or the virtual world, human beings subjectively construct the world. Many problems exist objectively, but if "humans" cannot see them, then the problems are treated as nonexistent. This logic of "seeing as problem" is undoubtedly a convenient alibi for exemption. As an artist, what is your understanding of "seeing" and "not seeing"? And how do these notions influence the boundaries of your creation?

The dialectic between "seeing" and "not seeing" lies at the core of modern power structures. In the real world, people measure politics and the very scale of life with their own bodies. This act of measurement is closely tied to personal experience, position, and identity, yielding different perspectives and conclusions. In the virtual world, the screen acts as a medium, and algorithms as filters, selectively displaying and concealing, thereby shaping our perception.

In today's screen-dominated era, the boundaries between real and virtual have dissolved; they mutually shape one another. In my work, I attempt to break these visual boundaries, prompting audiences to question what they see and what remains unseen. I often employ mediums that introduce obstacles to viewing—miniature displays, sensors, polarizing films, thermal sensors. These barriers themselves are, in my view, part of an inquiry into “seeing” and “not seeing.” The medium is the message; the obstacle is also the message.

4. Do you personally experience “burnout”?

As an individual in modern society, I inevitably feel the pressures and fatigue brought by the “burnout society.” We are compelled to constantly chase efficiency, productivity, and achievements, at the expense of slower rhythms and inward reflection. This sense of exhaustion is not only physical but also spiritual. It stems from the relentless pursuit of meaning, a pursuit that often proves futile.

At the same time, it forces us to reflect on why we feel burnout, and on the hidden social mechanisms and power structures behind it. In my work, I attempt to reveal the roots of this fatigue, exploring the complex entanglements of technology, politics, and the body, in order to evoke resonance from the audience.

5. In art, there seems to be a recurring cycle of similar questions. Across history, artists have often faced similar problems. How do you view this similarity?

The cyclical recurrence of questions in art history reflects humanity's confrontation with eternal themes—power, ethics, existence, death—across different historical epochs. History itself can be seen as a cycle of symbols, where each era repeats the past but imbues it with new meanings.

In the age of technology and the Internet, this cycle of symbols grows even more complex. Screens and virtual reality reshape our historical memory and cultural signs. Artists no longer merely draw inspiration from past symbols; they redefine them through new media.

For me, the similarity of problems does not imply mere repetition, but rather re-interpretation. Artists must find new ways to respond to these enduring questions—through the lens of technology, through a re-examination of historical symbols, or through inner reflection.

6. In this exhibition, the first work *The Trial* takes as its subject the eyes of Sam Altman, founder of OpenAI. These eyes shed tears amid flames, surrounded by entwined blood vessels, as if standing on a bridge between reality and the virtual—like a bell ringer striking the chimes of a new world. Why did you choose Sam Altman's eyes? Why blood vessels?

I chose Sam Altman's eyes for *The Trial* deliberately. As a central figure in AI, Altman embodies both symbolism and paradox—he is both a driver of new technologies and a witness to, and agent of, their potential perils. His tears and the fiery backdrop symbolize this duality: creation and uncertainty, innovation and anxiety for humanity's fate.

The blood vessels represent the inseparability of technology and human life. Today, our flesh is entwined with hardware and software, reality and virtuality. This is the condition modern humanity must confront. Fixed on the cross with chains, Altman becomes a figure of both “judgment” and possible “redemption.”

7. In this exhibition, wires, industrial veins, and fragmented materials break free from the limitations of the screen, giving each line sculptural necessity. The sculptural quality of the work is elevated. How do you interpret the use of new media to respond to humanity's recurring questions?

In my works, wires and conduits are not merely physical connectors—they symbolize the relationships between technology, politics, and the body. Through these sculptural, physical elements, I attempt to break the two-dimensionality of screens, pulling the relationship between technology and the body into three-dimensional space, creating immersive experiences. These experiences aim to reveal how technology embeds itself into our lives, extending and even becoming our bodies.

In this sense, my work does not only respond to humanity's recurring historical questions but also emphasizes the urgency of a contemporary, evolving new reality and politics.

8. We discussed earlier the influence of “burnout” and “efficiency” in daily life. As an active artist, you mentioned revealing the roots of burnout through your work. In *The Ventriloquism of the Flag*, I saw you dismantling the idea of a single subject. Could you describe the real-world impetus behind this work?

The origin of *The Ventriloquism of the Flag* lies in a news story during the pandemic: an isolated elderly man, living alone, died of starvation because he could not use a smartphone app to buy food during lockdown. The news struck me deeply. At that moment, Benjamin Franklin's 1754 slogan “Join, or Die” came to mind. It seemed a chilling metaphor for our present: if you do not join the technological tide, you perish.

In this work, the flag is no longer a fixed, singular symbol but a dynamic, redefined one. Lying on the floor, the words it reveals do not come from revolutionary fervor but from the subtle, deathly coercion of modern technological control over individual will.

9. In our earlier discussion of “seeing” and “not seeing,” the work *Echoes of Specters* seems to respond to the invisible efficiency of political shaping. Previously, you created similar works with real fists; here, the fists are AI-generated. Can you describe the relation and difference between AI-generated fists and real fists?

The fists in *Echoes of Specters* embody a subtle yet profound relationship between the real and the artificial. In the age of AI, the boundary between symbol and reality has blurred. Signs have detached from the real, forming an independent symbolic system. AI-generated fists are precisely such products: they simulate reality but transcend it.

Unlike real fists, AI fists lack materiality and historicity—their power comes not from muscle and bone but from data and algorithms. Yet, paradoxically, their immateriality lends them broader symbolic potency. They not only represent violence but also warn us that even ideology itself can be manipulated, forged, and simulated.

If my earlier work with real fists (*The Jokers' Revolution No.2*) addressed the performativity and dimensional reduction of users, then *Echoes of Specters* goes further: today's users have fully concealed their flesh within AI's simulated shells.

10. Finally, let us discuss *Anatomy of the Monument*. The piece evokes a sense of sublimity and religiosity. The gesture of grasping the arrow feels participatory, while the industrial fake grass conveys both beginning and end. Does this reflect the “eternity” you mentioned earlier?

Anatomy of the Monument indeed attempts to convey a sense of eternity—but not of endless time, rather of recurring historical cycles and the constant deconstruction of meaning. The gesture of holding the arrow symbolizes humanity's enduring attempts to seize control of destiny. The arrow itself stands for technology and knowledge as guiding forces. Yet the gesture also implies failure: in trying to master history, technology and power in turn bind humanity, making us slaves to our own creations.

The artificial “grass” sprouting from the monument symbolizes resilience and hope. Yet, being fake, it also embodies fabricated hope, reminding us that even cycles of renewal can be forged. Perhaps even falsified hope continuously enters new historical processes, slowly transforming the very nature of “eternity.”